1

TERMS AND CONCEPTS - PART I

Unit Structure:

1.0 Objectives

1.1 Introduction to Modern Indian Fiction in English

1.2 Indianness

1.3 Postmodernism

1.4 Postcolonialism

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1.6 Summing up

1.7 Important Questions

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1.0 OBJECTIVES

Dear learner, this chapter will offer you the Introduction to Modern Indian Fiction in English. You will develop a basic understanding of the concepts such as Indianness, Postmodernism, Postcolonialism and Diaspora etc. The chapter will also acquaint you with the basic features of modern Indian fiction. Besides, you will develop an understanding of the characteristic features of Indianness, Postmodernism, postcolonialism and Diaspora.

1.1 INTRODUCTION TO MODERN INDIAN FICTION IN ENGLISH

In the twenty-first century Indian English Literature, current Indian English Fiction has carved out its own niche. A new generation of novelists has emerged in the spotlight, including Khushwant Singh, Arun Joshi, Kamala Markandaya, Anita Desai, Salman Rushdie, Manju Kapur, Amitav Ghosh, and Kiran Desai.

Khushwant Singh's Train to Pakistan is about a sensational subject, and the current publication reflects the same mood. It violently and brazenly depicts the themes of social, cultural, and religious identities, brutality, murders, rapes, bestiality, and migration, as well as the nation's ill-fate, India, which is divided into two halves.

Well, we can see the “Dilemma of Existence of a Modern Man in Arun Joshi's *The Last Labyrinth*," the second paper is titled. This piece of work shows modern man's mentality, his search for self-identity, and his desire for peace and happiness. And if we take a look at Kamala Markandaya’s works then it is a visualisation of socioeconomic reality in rural India. Through a number of Markandaya's notable works, the author paints a vivid picture of oriental culture. *Some Inner Fury, Nectar in the Sieve, Possession,*

A Handful of Rice, The Coffer Dams, Two Virgins, and The Golden Honeycomb. these are some of the best works written by Kamala Markandaya

If we take a critical gaze on Anita Desai's *In Custody*, we understand that the truths are beyond the restricted self. The author has used a variety of language strategies to peel back the layers of the psychic truth. 'Psychology is the portrayal of truth, and reality becomes the standard. The issues of women's independence are discussed in Manju Kapur's key works. Through her works, we can see that she has logically depicted the changing role of women from the lifeless past, when women relied on others for emotional and material necessities, to the vibrant present, where women are taught to lead and perceive themselves as conquerors rather than victims of circumstance. The current significant issue in Indian society is the erosion of personal and social values. Through the key works of the famous diasporic novelist Jhumpa Lahiri, we can see the exposure of daringly disintegrating relationships and marital problems.

On both a quantity and quality basis, Amitav Ghosh might be considered the leading novelist among modern Indian fiction writers. Ghosh examines history in *The Calcutta Chromosome*, and in *The Hungry Tide,* the author does an excellent job of describing how ecological disasters might be depicted through symbols.

Arundhati Roy's The God of Small Things and Shobha De's S's Secret are best to study the role of relationships. Kiran Desai uses the protagonist Sampath from *Hullabaloo in the Guava Orchard* to explore the concept of evolution transition. Kiran Desai's well-known novel *The Inheritance of Loss* explores the issues of inferiority complex and Indians' undying passion for the west.

In recent years, contemporary Indian English fiction has emerged as one of India's most vibrant literary fields. The main strength of contemporary Indian English fiction might be summarised as "universality in diversity." In this unit, we will discuss Indian English fiction. The learner will benefit greatly from the diversity of techniques taken in this unit, as well as the wide range of topics and analytical approaches. We will try to attempt to include practically all modern fiction writers in Indian English Fiction, which aids in fully comprehending this genre. Overall, this unit is filled with current trends in modern Indian English literature and is very valuable for instructors and academics interested in delving deeper into Indian English fiction.

1.2 INDIANNESS

Though it came later than the original English literature, which originated in England with the very incarnation of English as a popular language, Indian English literature has given us many reasons to be proud of our contribution to world literature. Indians began learning English to distinguish themselves from other 'Indians' who did not speak or understand the language, and unfortunately, this is still true to a large extent today.

Things began to change, though, as Indians learned their rulers' language. Indian writing in English drew not only a British audience, but also provided Indians with a compelling motive to master the language. Since its inception, Indian English literature has come a long way. Indian literary critics have begun to look into the concept of Indianness in Indian English poetry and literature of all kinds. The quest has led to various wonderful discoveries, from seeing the East to experiencing the East.

Well, let's try to understand these two questions and figure out their answers. Question number one is “What is Indianness?” and the second is “What is Indianness in Indian English Literature?” The question of what constitutes Indianness is practically impossible to answer. What is Indianness not? Today, as the globe fights the greatest pandemic in decades in the form of Coronavirus, coded COVID-19, people around the world are greeting each other in the Indian way and practising Yoga and name chantings. We used to do what they're doing now. We taught many hundred centuries ago what the world is learning today. As a result, there is no way to resolve the Indianness issue. However, we may get right to the heart of the matter. We might try to track down and summarise Indianness in Indian English Literature.

This is a huge question. There is no easy answer that will satisfy the person who asked the question. At the same time, caution is required. Any complicated response might easily confound the concept of Indianness. Indianness is more than just a matter of ethnicity. It's not just about our amazing civilization, traditions, and culture. It has nothing to do with how we live or act. It's not just about which faith is the best. What exactly is Indianness? And, when we're talking about Indianness in Indian English literature, what exactly is that is?

All the aforementioned characteristics combine to form Indianness. It's a notion that comes to mind and pushes a person's emotional outpouring to relate to the aspects of a specific event; in this case, it's literary work. While Indianness as an idea can be a perfect blend of all of the above, anything can be used to represent the simple idea of Indianness until it connects the reader's mind with India – India as a thought, not just a country. If we take this seriously, Indianness is a characteristic that must exist in Indian English literature; or else, it will appear vacant or superficial, if not completely hollow. Because of their language, those who write in English are naturally cut off from the majority of Indianness. It's an undeniable fact and truth that we can't overlook. Furthermore, if an English-language literary work contains nothing that conveys Indianness, the work will become obsolete for both Indians and foreigners. Consider this: an Indian will read the book because of the link, which the English language frequently usurps, and a foreigner will read the book because of something new he can learn, which the language further simplifies. H. W. Longfellow's brilliant idea is that “nationality is important in literature, but universality is better.” What, on the other hand, isn't universal? Only one's roots can provide inspiration to a writer. A writer learns numerous things as he grows older and as he lives in different societies. However, it is also true that a writer strengthens his art

by selecting the greatest arrows for his quiver from history and the womb of civilisation.

To finish this section, it is clear that Indianness is more than a concept. In Indian English literature, Indianness is an activity that elicits responses from the audience. Indianness refers to the incorporation of values and history into a literary work that began, evolved, and transformed on Indian land. Krishna and Ram, as well as their teachings, contribute to the Indianness of Indian English Poetry, which is admired and cherished by the general public. The livelihood of a poor man while also assisting another, a fellow commoner in need, is what characterises Indianness in a story or novel that not only provokes pathos in the hearts of viewers but also allows them to dive deep into the depths of Indian philosophy, which motivates us to live for others every day of our lives.

Any literary work written in English by an Indian is called Indian English Literature, and it has an element of Indianness by default. However, simply being a work by an Indian does not automatically contribute to substantial and obvious features that could be characterised as Indianness. Indianness includes all aspects of Indian literature that incorporate or illustrate Indian values, the Indian way of life, Indian religious colors; Indian history; and even various Indian issues, and since we're dealing with Indian English literature, simply add English to these lines. Take, for example, Raja Rao's works, with a particular concentration on Kanthapura. The novel highlights all of the Indianness of the time, including challenges and answers, as well as constructive and destructive elements. Similarly, Anand and Narayan's works, Coolie and Guide, have beautifully depicted the Indian way of life to the globe.

In India's modern literary scene, works by Chetan Bhagat and Amish Tripathi, Anita Nair and Arundhati Roy, and even Durjoy Datta and other sensual writers demonstrate Indianness, but only in a narrow context and according to their comfort and the predilection of their individual target groups.

1.3 POSTMODERNISM

Postmodernism in Indian English Literature alludes to works published after 1980. If Raja Rao's Kanthapura (1938) represents modernism in Indian English literature, postmodernism is reflected in Salman Rushdie's Midnight's Children (1981) and Nissim Ezekiel's Latter-Day Psalms (1982). The term "post-modernism" was coined in the late twentieth century to describe a reaction or response to modernism. As a result, postmodernism can only be comprehended in the context of modernism. Postmodernism is fundamentally opposed to what modernism promotes. While postmodernism appears to be extremely similar to modernism in many aspects, it differs in its attitude regarding many of these movements. For example, modernism tends to provide a fragmented vision of human subjectivity and history, but it portrays that fragmentation as sad, as something to be lamented and mourned as a loss. On the other hand, postmodernism glorifies fragmentation, provisionality, and incoherence

rather than lamenting them. Modernism and postmodernism share some qualities, making it difficult for critics to distinguish one from the other. It would be more useful to compare the qualities of postmodernism to those of modernism. Like modernism, postmodernism argues that truth is relative and that there is no absolute truth. According to postmodernism, truth is not reflected in human comprehension of it but rather is manufactured as the mind attempts to comprehend its own unique reality. As a result, truth and untruth are equivalent terms.

After 1980, the Indian literary scene, like the rest of the world, became postmodern in all aspects of life. There are several motivations behind its creation. Its ramifications have also been multifaceted. More than postwar circumstances, postcolonial forces have played a crucial and unique role in India. It is true that a genre known as Indian Writing in English prospered and continued to flourish only between 1980 and 2010.

Now let's take a look at some of the famous authors in this field. Ruskin Bond is a British-born Indian writer. For his short story collection, Our Trees Still Grow in Dehra, he received the Sahitya Akademi Award, India's National Academy Award for Literature, in 1992. He received the Padma Shri in 1999 for his contributions to children's literature. He now lives in Landour, near Mussoorie, with his adopted family. As a follow-up to The Room on the Roof, he wrote Vagrants in the Valley. His novel, The Flight of Pigeons (2003), was adapted into the film Junoon. The BBC produced a TV series based on The Room on the Roof. A Bollywood director, Vishal Bhardwaj, made a film based on his popular children's novel The Blue Umbrella in 2007.

Ruth Prawar Jabwala and Kamala Markandaya were among the first to jump on board. Ruth Prawar Jabwala made fun of the Hindu marriage system and the plight of Indian women. To Whom She Will, The House Holders, Esmond in India, A New Dominion (1973), Heat and Dust (1975), and In Search of Love and Beauty (1976) were among her works (1983). Nayantara Sahgal, on the other hand, depicted political themes, sexual freedom, the erosion of moral values, and disillusionment in India's past and present. Her novels include: *A Time to be Happy* (1958), *Plans for Departure* (1958), *This Time of Morning* (1968), *Storm in Chandigarh* (1969), *The Day in Shadow* (1971) etc. and Kamala Markandaya published *Nectar in a Sieve* (1954), *Some Inner Fury* (1955), *Possession* (1963), A *Silence of Desire* (1960), *A Handful of Rice* (1966). With this great publication, she carved her name on the canvas of Indian English Literature. Another destination was Khushwant Singh. They live in two worlds, one in the past and one in the present. Postmodern men and women reject their sense of belonging and instead celebrate and glorify their despair at the expense of material comforts.

There are many authors who have received the Sahitya Academy Award and it is worth noting that the Sahitya Academy Award is given to the best novels written in English by both Indian residents and non-residents. Here is the list of the postmodern novels that have received the Sahitya Academy Award. Arun Joshi won for *The Last Labyrinth* in 1982. Nayantara Sahgal's

Rich Like Us won a award in 1986, Vikram Seth's The Golden Gate won in 1988, Amitav Gosh's The Shadow Lines won in 1989, Sashi Deshpande's That Long Silence won in 1990, Sunetra Gupta's Memories of Rain won in 1996, Kiran Nagarkar's Cuckold won in 2000, Upamanyu Chatterjee's The Mammaries of the Welfare State won in 2004.

Shashi Tharoor (1956-) is a columnist and the Indian Minister of State for Human Resource Development. He is a Member of Parliament from Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala. He is a journalist, a diplomat, and a politician. The Great Indian Novel is his debut novel (1989). It is satirical, historical, and mythical, and it depicts the current political situation in India. The story of Mahabharatha is used to tell the story of Indian independence and its aftermath. It contains numerous references to Indian history, geography, and current events.

A number of authors in postmodern Indian English Literature have poured their souls into their work, spreading the glory of postmodern Indian fiction in English. Now let us have a look at some of the characteristics of postmodern writing.

As in postmodernism, all ideas are new, so sometimes it becomes difficult and confusing to properly understand these terms. Irony, playfulness, black humour.

Pastiche: Pastiche is a term used to describe the process of combining or "paste" various parts together. Many postmodernist authors blended, or "pasted," pieces of earlier genres and styles of literature to create a new narrative voice or to remark on their contemporaries' writing.

Magical realism: Arguably the most important postmodern technique, magical realism is the introduction of fantastic or impossible elements into a narrative that seems real or normal. Time shifts, the reappearance of previously deceased characters, incredibly convoluted plots, time shifts, and myths and fairy tales becoming part of the narrative are all examples of magical realism novels. The best examples of magic realism are Salman Rushdie's "The Mourning Door," and *Midnight Children.*

Intertextuality: Intertextuality is the moulding of the meanings of texts by other texts. It could be anything from a writer borrowing and transforming a previous work to a reader referencing one work while reading another.

Paranoia: Another common postmodern topic is paranoia or the assumption that there is an organising system underneath the chaos of the world. Because no organising system exists for the postmodernist, the search for order is futile and ludicrous.

Temporal distortion: Fragmentation and non-linear storytelling are essential aspects in both modern and postmodern literature, hence this is a prevalent tactic in modernist fiction. Temporal distortion is employed in a number of ways in postmodern fiction, frequently for the sake of irony. In this literature, the author may jump forward or backwards in time, or there may be cultural and historical references that do not make sense.

Metafiction: Many postmodern authors use metafiction in their writing, which is essentially writing about writing, an attempt to make the reader aware of its fictionality, and, occasionally, the author's presence. This strategy is occasionally used by authors to allow for dramatic narrative shifts, implausible temporal jumps, or to maintain emotional distance as a narrator.

Historiographic metafiction: Linda Hutcheon coined the term "historiographic metafiction" to describe novels that fictionalise historical events and characters.

1.4 POST COLONIALISM

The stories of the societies that existed are brought to the fore in post-colonial Indian English writing. with regard to colonialism, the origin of Indian literature in English may be traced back to the end of the 18th century and the beginning of the 19th, when English education was more or less solidly entrenched in the three primary centres of British authority in India - Kolkata, Chennai, and Mumbai. However, during the post-colonial era, alterations occurred in the pattern of Indian English literature. In Indian English literature, post-colonialism can be defined as the ongoing shedding of Western thought's old skin and the birth of new consciousness, cognition, critique, and celebration. Self-expression is a concept that comes with this new understanding. Prior to 1947, most people in India branded and identified themselves as 'Indians,' in contrast to their British oppressors and tormentors. Mutual hatred and bitterness toward British colonial prowess could be regarded as a potential feeling of community and national identity.

In India, postcolonial English literature is created by "writing back," "re-writing," and "re-reading." This distinguishes the interpretation of well-known literature from the perspective of the colonised. As said before, Indian English Literature refers to the corpus of works created by Indian writers who write in English but whose first or second language is one of India's many regional languages. It's also linked to the works of Indian diaspora artists, including Salman Rushdie, who was born in India but raised elsewhere. Indo-Anglian literature refers to this collection of Indian English Literature. This work falls within the broader category of post-colonial English literature in India, including excellent works from previously colonised countries like India.

In this extremely complex context of post-colonial Indian English literature, Salman Rushdie's novel Midnight's Children can be viewed as the quintessential fictional novel for illustrating the nearly overwhelming and implausible difficulties inherent in forging a national identity in a hugely heterogeneous post-colonial society. In her novel Cracking India, Bapsi Sidhwa reflects this same idea—post-colonial Indian English writing and its unnoticed maturing. By focusing on one small neighbourhood in the Punjab province, she explores the similar idea of Indian society separating itself in its search for a cohesive, post-colonial national identity.

Novelists like Kamala Markandaya (*Nectar in a Sieve, Some Inner Fury, A Silence of Desire, Two Virgins*), Manohar Malgaonkar (*Distant Drum, Combat of Shadows, The Princes, A Bend in the Ganges and The Devil's Wind*), Anita Desai (*Clear Light of Day, The Accompanist, Fire on the Mountain, Games at Twilight*) and Nayantara Sehgal were able to discreetly convey the spirit of an independent India seeking to break free from British and traditional Indian cultures and forge a distinct identity, ushering in the age of post-colonial Indian English writing.

In the late 1970s, a new generation of Convent-educated, boarding-school educated, and elite novelists and authors began to emerge, all with a strategy to change the geography of post-colonial Indian English writing. For example, Salman Rushdie, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, and Shashi Tharoor, for example, lit up the literary world. Salman Rushdie's 'Midnight Children' received the Booker Prize in 1981, and Arundhati Roy and Kiran Desai followed suit in 1997 and 2006, each winning the Man Booker Prize. Meanwhile, new authors such as Pankaj Misra, Chetan Bhagat, Jhumpa Lahiri, William Dalrymple, and Hari Kunzuru have already established themselves on the international stage, and their works have received widespread acclaim.

In the 1980s and 1990s, India became an important and crucial literary nation. Midnight's Children by Salman Rushdie became a worldwide sensation. Vikram Seth's The Golden Gate was a worldwide success, making him the first writer from the Indian Diaspora to enter the field of international writers and make an indelible impression on the global literary landscape. Other novelists of repute in the contemporary times of post-colonial Indian English literature, comprise - Shobha De, G.V. Desani, M Ananthanarayanan, Bhadani Bhattacharya, Arun Joshi, Khushwant Singh, O.V. Vijayan, Allan Sealy, Shashi Tharoor, Amitav Ghosh, Upamanyu Chatterjee, Raj Kamal Jha, Amit Chaudhuri, Pankaj Mishra and Vikram Chandra.

Arundhati Roy, whose book The God of Small Things won the 1997 Booker Prize and became an international best-seller overnight, is the most recent Indian writer to take the world by storm. Other well-known Indian-origin writers who contributed to post-colonial Indian English literature include Rohinton Mistry, Firdaus Kanga, Kiran Desai, Sudhir Kakar, Ardeshir Vakil, and Jhumpa Lahiri. Former Prime Minister P.V. Sthanam Narasimha Rao's *The Insider*, Satish Gujral's *A Brush with Life*, R.K. Laxman's *The Tunnel of Time,* Prof. Bipin Chandra Pal's *India After Independence*, Sunil Khilnani's *The Idea of India*, J.N. Dixit's *Fifty Years of India's Foreign Policy,* Yogesh Chadha's *Rediscovering Gandhi*, and Pavan K. V.

In the mid-twentieth century, poets including Nissim Ezekiel (The Unfurnished Man), P Lal, A K Ramanujan (The Striders, Relations, Second Sight, Selected Poems), Dom Moraes (A Beginning), Keki Daruwalla, Geive Patel, Eunice de Souza, Adil Jussawala, Kamala Das, Arun Kolatkar, and R. Parthasarathy As a result, these authors combined Indian idioms with English words in an attempt to depict a blend of Indian and Western

cultures, and they remain the most promising in the post-colonial Indian English literary genre.

1.5 DIASPORA

The name Diaspora, like the condition it describes, has evolved over time. What began as a phrase to characterise the dispersion of Jews across continents and was described by Safran in the early days of its theory building using a set of six traits, is today used in a wider, more inclusive sense, and relates to migrants, expatriates, or exile, depending on context. Diasporic literature, which includes the writings of immigrants and expatriates, as well as exiles, and is gradually beginning to include writings about them, is also witness to similar definitional shifts.

Any study of Indian literature, in general, must take into account works written in the country's numerous languages; discussions of Indian multilingualism and Indian diaspora literature are no exception. Since Indian diasporic literature in English has established itself as a unique genre due to its larger appeal, works in Indian regional languages are becoming incredibly popular among the general public at large as well as academia and intellectuals. In addition to Europe, poetry, fiction, drama, travel writing, and other non-fictional narratives by or about people of Indian origin living in the United Kingdom, the United States, Canada, South Africa, Trinidad, Australia, the Middle East, and the Far East have made an impact in English and Indian languages.

Several Indian and Indian origin writers who write in English, such as Salman Rushdie, V.S. Naipaul, Vikram Seth, Amitav Ghosh, Anita Desai, Rohinton Mistry, Bharati Mukherjee, Meena Alexander, Jhumpa Lahiri, Chitra Divakaruni Banerjee, Sujata Bhatt, Hari Kunzru, Kirin Narayan, Anjali Joseph etc. Diasporic elements can also be found in regional writing, as evidenced by the voices of Hindi writers such as Abhimanyu Unnuth, Manilal Doctor, Susham Bedi, Sudha Om Dhingra, Anita Kapoor, Abhinav Shukla, Satyendra Srivastava, Tejinder Sharma, Kavita Vachaknavi, Bengali writers such as Ketaki Kushari Dyson, Telugu writers such as Chimmata Kamala'

Various sources have evolved to address the issues of the Indian diaspora, from Mahatma Gandhi's Indian Opinion in South Africa to more recent Bengali publications like Agrobeej, to blogs and other social media like indiandiaspora.com. Most postcolonial categories of diasporic works, such as postcolonial writings, new literature, South Asian diasporic writings, and so on, are met with hostility.

General Themes and Features: Nostalgia, loss, and longing are frequently applied to diasporic writing. While the past and rootedness or rootlessness are frequently key themes in diasporic works, they are not the only ones. They convey a ton of information, and they can even be used to enhance diaspora sociological studies. From exposing culture shock and spatial shock to analysing minute minutiae of identity politics to demonstrating the generational difference to reversing culture shock and globalisation,

diasporic literature contrasts the real and the imaginary in a dramatic manner. In diasporic works, poignant experiences of forced labour, migration, and exile also find a home, giving voice to a wide number of individuals who would otherwise be voiceless.

Colour and Race:

Contemporary Indian diasporic writings in English that represent the lives of high-achieving groups like scientists, academics, medicos, techies, and the like have fewer instances of segregation in terms of colour and race as works by and about a group that often presents a model minority image. However, early English writings, as well as those that focus on the lives of indentured labourers, semi- and unskilled migrants, and expatriates, which are more prevalent in Indian vernacular writings, frequently face themes of race and colour.

Identity:

Identity in Diasporic writing is one of the essential concerns. Because diasporic identity is frequently perceived as shattered. While fragmentation, alienation, assimilation, and sometimes acculturation is written all over a diasporic existence, and these writings depict a lot of hybrid and hyphenated identities, it goes without saying that identity is not a constant, but an evolving process for everyone.

Nostalgia:

Although these themes, which evoke a persistent relationship with the past, are prominent in the majority of this type of literature, the technique varies. While some writers, such as Jhumpa Lahiri in The Namesake, express genuine nostalgia for the distant homeland, its traditions, and culture, others, such as Bharati Mukherjee in Jasmine or select stories in Divakaruni's Arranged Marriage, a question such practises in light of changing circumstances. Nostalgia and longing are reserved only for lost bonds with family and friends and not for all kinds of traditions.

Other themes:

There are a variety of themes and subjects in Diasporic writing, just as in Vikram Seth's *The Golden Gate* and *An Equal Music*, Divakaruni's retelling of mythology in *Palace of Illusions* or her most recent work, *The Forest of Enchantments*, or Anil Menon's futuristic fiction, other subjects are occasionally covered. Scholars such as Robin Cohen, Homi K. Bhabha, Stuart Hall, Edward Said, Vijay Mishra, James Clifford, Avtar Brah, Iain Chambers, Ketu Katrak, Rajani Srikant, and many others have used diasporic literature as part of their detailed studies of diaspora. Diasporic texts thus serve as a rich resource for comprehending identity politics, transnationalism, multiculturalism, and socio-spatial issues, as well as an interactive archive of the past, history, and individual and collective memory.

1. 6 SUMMING UP

Dear learner, let us sum up what we have learned in this chapter. We discussed the Introduction to Modern Indian Fiction in English. Consequently, we have arrived at a basic understanding of terms like Indianness, Postmodernism in Indian literature, Postcolonialism, Diaspora etc. The chapter also discussed the basic features of modern Indian fiction. Lastly, we studied the characteristics and features of Indianness, postmodernism, postcolonialism, and diaspora with illustrations.

1. 7 IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Consider working on the following concepts with the help of notes and the references given at the end of the chapter.

- The Evolution of Modern Indian English Fiction.
- Indianness in Literature.
- What is Postmodernism in Indian Literature?
- Postmodernism authors and their writings in India.
- Themes and subjects in Postcolonial Indian Literature.
- Salient Features of Postcolonial Indian Literature
- Diaspora and contribution to Indian English fiction.
- The features of diasporic writing
- Major authors in the Indian diaspora

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2

TERMS AND CONCEPTS - PART II

Unit Structure:

2.0 Objectives
2.1 Dalit Writing
2.2 Women's Writing in English
2.3 Globalization in Indian Fiction
2.4 Summing up
2.5 Important Questions
2.6 References

2.0 OBJECTIVES

Dear learner, this chapter will familiarise you with the rudimentary concepts of Modern Indian Fiction in English. You will develop a basic understanding of Dalit Writing, Women's Writing in English and the Globalization in Indian Fiction, which is a very important aspect of modern Indian fiction in English. The chapter will also acquaint you with some of the famous Dalit Writers and their works, and some of the famous Indian women writers and their magnum opus. Also, the current trends in Indian fiction in the context of globalisation. Besides, you will develop an understanding of the Dalit culture in India and the contribution of women authors in the history of modern Indian fiction in English.

2.1 DALIT WRITING

Dalit literature encapsulates the Dalits' collective consciousness of centuries of social, political, economic, and racial persecution. Dalit writing is a phenomenon that emerged after independence. The development of Dalit literature is historically significant. Dalits have always been on the margins of Indian society. Dalit literature is writing that depicts the Dalits' anguish and uncertainty in an aesthetic manner. Destruction of the family, poverty, humiliation, and improvised living conditions.

In ancient India, Dalits were known as "Achhut," "Asti Sudras," "Avarnas," and "Parihas," according to their traditional meanings. Dalit refers to a member of the caste rather than a class; it refers to members of the menial caste who have been stigmatised as "untouchable" due to the extreme cleanliness and contamination associated with their work. Outside of the original four-fold caste system of hereditary brahmins, Kshyatrias, Vaishyas, and Shudras, Dalits were considered "outcasts."

Who are Dalits?

The term 'Dalit' was coined by Jyotiba Rao Phule in the 19th century to describe the Hindus' former untouchable caste's enslavement. Those previously referred to as "Untouchables," "Depressed class," and "Harijan" are now referred to as "Dalit." The old definition of the term Dalit was changed because of Dr B.R. Ambedkar's widespread awakening and teaching, the term "Dalit" now refers to "one who, until recently, was bound by the shackles of atrocities and harassment and has begun rejecting God, Soul, Religion, Rebirth, Rituals, Miracles, Superstition, and other such things." Those who reject the soul accept atheism, scientific objectivity, rationalism, and morality. One who regards equality, freedom, eternity, and justice as the highest values in life.

Let us now have a look at some of the characteristics of Dalit literature. As you come to know, Dalit literature gives voice to those who are oppressed by racism and classism. The Dalit literature vehemently condemns Hinduism's 'Chaturvarna' and accepts man's morality. It is a literary posture adopted in Dr B.R. Amdedkar's effort to end untouchability. Dalit literature is life-oriented writing that arose from Dalit consciousness dealing with rejection and acceptance. Everyman's growth is depicted in Dalit literature. It also firmly promotes human principles like equality, liberty, fraternity, justice, etc.

As far as the scope of Dalit literature is concerned, over the last two decades, Dalit writing has developed and grown at a remarkable rate. The term Dalit literature will be utilised as long as men are exploited in India under the guise of caste, economic disparity, or any other means, and as long as Dalits exist. Dalit literature is a type of writing that binds all exploiters together. In many Indian languages, good Dalit literature is now being written. It's also being translated into a variety of Indian and international languages.

Major Dalit Writers: After discussing the meaning, characteristics, and scope of Dalit literature, let's have a look at some of the best known Dalit writers.

Namdeo Dhasal was a Marathi poet, writer, and Dalit campaigner from Maharashtra, India, who was born on February 15, 1949. He was a founding member of the Dalit Panthers, a social movement dedicated to ending India's caste system, in 1972. Between the 970s and the 1980s, the movement was active, and the term "Dalit" became well-known in India. Dhasal received the Padma Shri in 1999 and the Sahitya Akademi's Lifetime Achievement Award in 2004. He died on January 15, 2014.

Meena Kandasamy is an activist, poet, fiction writer, and translator from Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. Kandasamy's poetry volumes are *Touch* (2006)

and *Ms. Militancy* (2008). She edited "The Dalit", a bi-monthly alternative English magazine published by the Dalit Media Network, from 2001 to 2002.

Daya Pawar, also known as Dagdu Maruti Pawar, was an Indian Marathi language author and poet best known for his contributions to Dalit literature, which dealt with the atrocities faced by Dalits, or untouchables, under the Hindu caste system. He died on September 20, 1996. By religion, he was a Buddhist.

Urmila Pawar is an activist and writer from India. She is a significant figure in India's Dalit and feminist movements, and her works, all of which are written in Marathi, have been acclaimed by analysts and media outlets as a critique of social prejudice and savarna exploitation. "Kavach" and "A Childhood Tale," two of Pawar's short stories, have been widely read and are taught in Indian schools. Her collaboration with Meenakshi Moon on the participation of Dalit women made a significant contribution to the feminist construction of Dalit history in India. She received acclaim and various accolades for her autobiography, Aidan (Weave), which was one of the first of its kind by a Dalit woman. Maya Pandit later translated the book into English and published it as The Weave of My Life: A Dalit Woman's Memoirs. The book's foreword was written by Wandana Sonalkar.

Baby Kamble, also known as Babytai Kamble, was an Indian activist and author who lived between 1929 and 2012. She was born into the Mahar untouchable caste, Maharashtra's largest untouchable community. B. R. Ambedkar, a prominent Dalit leader, inspired her to become a well-known Dalit activist and writer. Kamble and her family became Buddhists and have lived their lives as Buddhists. She became well-known in her community as a writer and was affectionately known as Tai (Sister). Her contributions to great literary and activist activities are well recognised and cherished by the Dalit community. She was one of the first untouchable women writers, and her particular reflexive feminist writing style distinguished her from other Dalit and upper-caste women writers, whose gaze was constrained and reflexivity enslaved by caste and masculinity.

Besides these, there is an exhaustive list of Dalit writers, whose contributions have made a significant impact on the history of Dalit literature. Omprakash Valmiki, B.R Ambedkar, Narendra Jadhavi, Kancha Ilaiah, Mulk Raj Anand, Satyaranrayan, Bama Faustina Soosairay, Sharan Kumar Limbale, Vasan Moon, Baburao Betul, Jyoti Rao Phule, A.P Naimal, Arjun Dangle, Bhagwan Das, Debi Roy, K.Nath, Dev Kumar, Raja Dhale, Kanwal Bharati, Jatin Bala and Anant Rao Akele etc.

Major Dalit Autobiographies:

For a better understanding of Dalit literature, I would recommend you all to have a look at some of the famous Dalit autobiographies. Below is a list of some famous Dalit autobiographies:

Sr. No.	Name	The Title of the Autobiography
1	P.E Sonakamble	Athavaninche
2	Om Prakash Valmiki	Joothan
3	Shankar Rao Kharat	Tara Antaral
4	Keshav Meshram	Hakkikat Ani Jatayu
5	Daya Pawar	Baluta
6	Narendra Jhadav	Our Caste A Memoir
7	Laxman Mane	Upara: An Outsider
8	Laxman Gaikwad	Acharya
9	Kishor Santabai Kale	Against All Odd
10	Baby Kamble	The Prison We Broke
11	Urmila Pawer	Aydan
12	Sharan Kumar Limbele	Akkarmashi
13	Uttam Bandu Tupe	Katyavarchi Pote
14	Dada Saheb More	Gabal

There are many Dalit literature books in the market; you can choose any one of the topics to understand the history, background, and political turmoil of that particular location. In fact, Dalit literature is an examination of Dalits and their untold stories.

2.2 WOMEN'S WRITING IN ENGLISH

Today's female writers have no reason to be self-conscious about their use of the English language. They have merely a tool in their hands, which their education has provided and which they have mastered with the characteristic Indian flair for language. Their works are popular due to their unique use of language. A new language is being created by contemporary female writers. Literal translation, coining of proverbs, new compound terms, single phrases, idioms, or a series of lines that follow each other to approximate the order of vernacular dialogue are all used by these writers. The experimentation is full of enthusiasm and a desire to convey a specific vibe. To get the intended effect, they invent new terms. Contemporary Indian writers utilise new narrative patterns to put their ideas through in order to construct a new narrative and break free from the colonial mindset. Although some writers are unaware that they are experimenting, their efforts are noteworthy because they show a significant shift in attitudes regarding the English language. In the world of worldwide literature, these authors have been successful in retaining the distinct flavour of their location in their works, and current Indian women's literature takes pride in its individuality.

Women's writing has given Indian literature a new dimension. Women's writing was regarded as a major medium of modernism and feminist views in the twentieth century. Feminist writing in Indian English literature has had amazing success during the last two decades. Indian English women writers' novels address both current and historical concerns concerning women. Women's writers in India have been investigating feminine subjectivity and dealing with issues ranging from childhood to womanhood. The fundamental focus of Karnala Markandaya's, Shashi Deshpande's, and Anita Desai's writings is the problems and issues that women confront in today's male-dominated world. The general public enjoys these publications, and the publishers profit handsomely from them. The publishers believe that the writing will thrive because of the bold issues that female novelists tackle. Some of the authors describe the entire world of women with breathtaking candour.

Voices in the City and Where Shall We Go This Summer, two of Anita Desai's novels, depict the complexity of a man-woman relationship. She attempted to delve into the protagonists' psychological states. Authors like Sarojini Naidu pioneered Indian English writing. With her words, this renowned poetess enchanted the audience. Authors like Nayantara Sahgal and Rama Mehta have also written about feminism. In Indian English writing by women, Kamala Das, Anita Nair, and Susan Viswanathan hold a unique place. Novelists such as Kamala Mrkandaya and Anita Desai have captured the essence of Indian culture and values. In the 1990s, India became a popular literary nation when a lot of female authors made their debut. In the books of Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni, Suniti Namjoshi, and Anuradha Marwah Roy, realism was a major theme. Among the novelists on the list are Bharati Mukherjee, Nergis Dalai, Krishna Sobti, Dina Mehta, Indira Goswami, Malati Chendur, Gauri Deshpande, Namita Gokhale, Ruth

Jhabvala, Shobha De, Arundhati Roy, and Jhumpa Lahiri. Their novels are noted for taking on a contemporary style. Authors like Namita Gokhale and Shobha De write novels that are very vocal. The majority of these female novelists are noted for their controversial viewpoints. Essentially, these are protest novels, and they might be viewed as an explosion of misgivings.

Let us have a look at some well-known authors in detail.

Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni is the Betty and Gene McDavid Professor of Writing at the University of Houston Creative Writing Program and an Indian-American author and poet. Arranged Marriage, her short story collection, earned an American Book Award in 1996, and two of her novels (The Mistress of Spices and Sister of My Heart), as well as a short story called *The Word Love*, were turned into films. The Orange Prize shortlist included *Mistress of Spices*, *Sister of My Heart, Oleander Girl, Palace of Illusions,* and *One Amazing Thing,* which have all been optioned for film or television adaptation. Divakaruni's stories are set mostly in India and the United States, and they frequently centre on the lives of South Asian immigrants. She works for both children and adults, and her novels have been published in a variety of genres, including realistic fiction, historical fiction, magical realism, myth, and fantasy.

Suniti Namjoshi is an Indian poet and fabulist who was born in 1941 in Mumbai. She grew up in India, worked in Canada, and now lives with English writer Gillian Hanscombe in the southwest of England. Her work is lighthearted and imaginative, yet it frequently confronts stereotypes like racism, sexism, and homophobia. She is the author of numerous collections of fables and poems, as well as six novels and over a dozen children's books. Her work has been translated into Spanish, Italian, Dutch, Chinese, Korean, Hindi, and Turkish, among others. *Feminist Fables* (1981.) is one of her famous works.

Bharati Mukherjee was an Indian American-Canadian writer and professor emerita at the University of California, Berkeley's English department. She published a number of novels and short story collections, as well as nonfiction books.

Kavita Kané is a former journalist and writer from India. She is well-known for her works of mythology fiction. Her entire body of work is based on Indian mythology. *Karna's Wife: The Outcast Queen* is her best-selling novel. She is a retelling novelist of the new generation.

2.3 GLOBALISATION IN INDIAN FICTION

Globalisation is a tough idea to define, especially when the phrase or notion has evolved to relate to a wide range of variables and trends, to the point where the mere utterance of the term elicits a lot of emotion and passion. Whereas the mainstream perspective of globalisation in Western Europe and North America is the existence of numerous chances for global economic development and a significant contribution to improving people's living conditions. Globalisation is seen as a negative process that increases inequality inside and between countries in the Third World. Globalisation,

international integration and fragmentation, uniformity and localization, increasing material abundance and increasing suffering, homogeneity and dominance are all antinomies and dialectics at work.

What is the relationship between culture and markets and economic globalisation? Or, how do financial market changes influence literature and language? These challenges have risen to prominence in today's social, economic, and political environment and must be addressed. Literature has always been susceptible to social, political, and economic pressures. The most recent phenomenon has been the eruption of a vibrant post-colonial discourse that is writing back to the empire and expressing its own identity, culture, and national uniqueness. Literature in the post-colonial period mirrored the greater flow of people from one country to another, primarily to the coloniser's country, and dealt with problems such as migration, hybridity, multiculturalism, loss of identity, and the collapse of rigid national identities. Globalisation hastened this process, resulting in the unification of cultural practices and increased cultural marketing through the influx of McDonald's and Pizza Huts, among other restaurants, in all major cities, as well as the celebration of special days such as Valentine's Day, Father's Day, and other holidays. The visible impact of globalisation may be seen in the cosmopolitan and metro-cultural metropolises that have sprung up all over the world. Neocolonialism is gradually and silently seizing markets and culture, rather than using violent political tactics.

After nearly forty years of import substitution, India began the process of globalisation with the adoption of the New Economic Policy in 1991. As an economic activity, globalisation has not remained separate from other cultural dimensions of society. *The White Tiger* by Aravinda Adiga was published in 2008, and before the end of the year, it had made its author famous all over the world. Look at it in the context of modern Indian representation. *The White Tiger*, a 2008 Booker Prize winner, examines the contrast between India's growth as a modern global economic giant and the protagonist, Balram, who comes from a background of rural poverty. Indian culture has changed dramatically over the last six decades, and these changes, many of which are for the better, have upended conventional structures and life's security. The New India that is forming around them has left many impoverished Indians concerned and puzzled. Regardless of how quickly the Indian economy grows, the lives of the poor continue to paint a gloomy picture of rural India. As a result, it's evident that the novel's central focus is to depict the effects of globalisation on Indian democracy.

Since the mid-1980s, the term "globalisation" has become increasingly popular. Many researchers examine literary works in order to identify echoes of various globalisation topics within the texts and surroundings, as well as to verify globalisation reality through literary forms. Other literature/literary studies are used to elicit, support, and interpret many social, political, literary, and cultural notions in the context of globalisation.

In diasporic works, reverse culture and spatial shocks are frequently a motif, but in the globalised era, these writings are gradually moving away from a pro-Indian, pro-western, or Indo-western identity and toward a more

international identity. Globalisation and the image of the global citizen. While reverse culture and geographical shocks are common themes in diasporic works, in the globalised time, these writings are increasingly transitioning away from a pro-Indian, pro-western, or Indo-western identity and toward a more cosmopolitan identity.

2.4 SUMMING UP

Dear learner, let us sum up what we have learned in this chapter. We discussed the basic concepts of Modern Indian Fiction in English. We have arrived at a basic understanding of Dalit writing, Women's writing in English and the Globalization in Indian English Fiction. The chapter also discussed some of the famous Dalit writers and their works, and some of the famous Indian women writers and their literary works. We then took a cursory look at the Dalit culture that has dominated modern Dalit fiction. Lastly, we studied the contributions of women authors in the history of modern Indian fiction in English.

2.5 IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

Consider working on the following concepts/aspects with the help of notes and the references given at the end of the chapter.

- Dalit culture in India
- The Impact of Dalit Writing on Contemporary Indian Fiction
- The structure and the characteristic features of Dalit literature
- History and the development of Dalit writing in India
- Write an essay on the major contributors to dalit writing.
- Major Women writers in Indian English Literature.
- The Features of the Writings of Women in Indian English Literature
- Globalisation in Indian English Literature Etc.

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3

CRITICAL STUDY OF KIRAN NAGARKAR'S *GOD'S LITTLE SOLIDER*

Unit structure:

3.0 Objectives

3.1 Introduction

3.2 Analysis of *God's Little Soldier*

3.3 Conclusion

3.4 Suggested Questions

3.5 Bibliography/Reference

3.0 OBJECTIVES

- To introduce readers about Kiran Nagarkar
- To analyse his novel *God's Little Soldier*

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Kiran Nagarkar is a literary ace who writes against malefactors and encounters the consequence with courage. He is one of the finest Indian novelist of English novels of our time but has not yet been recognized as he deserved to be. He writes about the failure of today's destructive and selfish society. He also touches the human behavior, imagination and an exceptional humor.

Two different cultures in Kiran Nagarkar's *God's Little Soilder*. The novel is set in Mumbai, Afghanistan, America, and Kashmir terrains. The novel is called "literary Terrorism" because Zia attempts to kill famous novelist Salman Rushdie at the literary seminar in Cambridge University. Zia's life passes through three religious avatars Islam, Christian, and Hindu. He changes his name in each of the religions as Zia Khan, brother Lucens, and Tejas Nirantar. He attempts to find peace and pleasure through these three religions 'faith but fails and he becomes fanatic and terrorist. He regards himself as protector of Islam and follows the sinful lifestyles. In then novel Nagarkar has employed extreme humor, metaphor, Growing up in a well to do, cultured Muslim family in Mumbai, Zia, a gifted young mathematician, is torn between the unquestioning certainties of his aunts faith and the tolerant, easy going views of his parents. At Cambridge University, his beliefs crystallize into a fervent orthodoxy, which ultimately leads him to a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan. The burden of endemic violence and killings. After all its toll on Zia. Tormented by his need for forgiveness, he is then drawn reluctantly to CHRIST. But peace continues to elide him, and Zia is once again driven to seek out causes to defend and

fight for, whatever be the sacrifices involved. Posited against Zia is his brother, Amanat, a writer whose life is severely constrained by sickness, even as his mind is liberated by doubt. Theirs is a relationship that is as much a blood bond as it is an opaque wall of incomprehension. Weaving together the narratives of the extremist and the liberal, God's Little Soldier underscores the incoherent ambiguities of good and evil, and the tragic conflicts that have riven people and nation

3.2 ANALYSIS OF *GOD'S LITTLE SOLDIER*

The novel, Gods little soldier, explores contemporary violence of society. It is presented in the form of global terrorism and existence in the psyche of contemporary society. Nagarkar states that he does not perceive terrorism in isolation but as an essential part of the entire society. He focuses on tragic incidents of 1993 bomb blast in Mumbai, Terrorism has become headache to the entire world and every nation is fighting against international terrorism. Nagarkar has written the portrait of a man who always wants the good and always achieves evils, It is a parable about the very line between reality and intense book, which in spite of its length never loses its breakneck speed, this curious collection of human foolishness will remain important far beyond this literacy fantasy, religiosity and fanaticism, humbleness and violence, in our times. This colorful and intense book, which in spite of its length never loses its breakneck speed, this curious collection of human foolishness will remain important will remain important far beyond this literary autumn.

Zia belongs to highly educated, liberal and middle class Muslim family. He is an expert, scholar and prodigy in math's. Zia brother Amanat is a well novelist. Obsession, extremism, fanaticism and terrorism are the themes of the novel. Here in the beginning chapters, author highlights Islamic rites, culture and customs. Every religion has its rites, ritual and traditions. Zubeida, Zia's aunt, tries to pursue him towards obsessive and fanatic of her religion and intolerant towards the other religions. Ramadan in holy month for Islamic community and everyone keeps the Rojas in the month. Zia also keeps fast and prays with his aunt.

Nagarkar portrays the Bollywood connections of Zia and his beloved Sagari. She is the most popular child actress in the nation.Her films have already been released. Two of them celebrated silver jubilees all over India. The novels focal point is the manner in which it handled setting. Nagarkar has portrayal of Suleiman Mansions in Bhendi Bazaar, multi culture of Mumbai. He has covered the extremely cold mountain fastness of the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan, and breathtaking descriptions of the Trappist Monastery fastness of the Mujahedeen in Afghanistan, and breathtaking descriptions of the Trappist Monastery and Hindu ashram. Nagarkar interweaved his magical worlds with the dexterity of a master weaver creating new patterns on his word-loom. There is galaxy of memorable characters including the fascinatingly devout Zia, the enigmatic and self - deprecating Amanat the angel of mercy, child actress Sagari who becomes the guardian of the khan family, Abbajaan, Ammi, Zubeida Khaala,Countess Antonia and her daughter Vivian.

The novel is powerful which forces which forces one to re-examine previously held beliefs about religion and commonly held stereotypes and churns up one's established notions of integrity, honor, reverence, tolerance, and love. In the quest for the right and good life, neither Zia's approach ultimately worked nor worked nihilism. He spares no opportunity to lampoon the American way of life, arms deals, the new Russia, and more. This distends God's Little Soldier virtually to breaking point, almost turning it into a ragbag of pieces; some effective, some not, and some straying very close to hollow mockery. The novel has many rooms ;here, there are spaces set aside for satire and irony; areas demarcated for psychological reality and yet other corners occupied by work that is socially engaged. In the last Zia's identity is a Hindu name Teas Nirantar and he provides weapons to the terrriots in the Kashmir territory.

Every religion has extremists and these extremists are responsible of spreading intolerance in the society. According to me reasons why one becomes a terrorist may include poverty, illiteracy, and unemployment, difficult situation in family and obsessive faith. These aspects may be responsible for provoking one to this violent path of fundamentalism. I would like to sum of the novel with author's quote about terrorism.

Nagarkar does not prevent his imagination from running roit.As Lucens leaves the monastery, he begins to dabble in the stock exchange and comes up with plans to save America from legalized abortion and teenage pregnancy. Organizations are formed, followers recruited, and money rose for the purposes, before Lucien's eventual downfall. Here, his activities include making massive profits in the stock, running a campaign against abortion and setting up an organization called the guardian angels dedicated to nothing less than the moral rejuvenation of godless, sinful America. Later his fertile and febrile imagination takes the terrorist across many continents and puts him through situations, which looks too farfetched. One cannot imagine a Christian willing to get into big league and sell nuclear weapons to the terrorists in Afghanistan for raising funds for his zero orphan institute.

Growing up in a well –to –do, cultured Muslim family in Bombay Zia, a gifted young mathematician, is torn between the unquestioning certainties of his a aunt's faith an d the tolerant, easy-going views of his parents. At Cambridge University, his beliefs crystallize into a fervent orthodoxy, which ultimately leads him to a terrorist training camp in Afghanistan. The burden of endemic violence and killings, takes its toll on Zia. Tormented by his need for forgiveness, he is then drawn reluctantly to peace. Weaving together the narratives of the extremist and the tragic conflicts that have riven people and nations.

3.3 CONCULSION

Nagarkar has displayed extensive knowledge including religions like Islam, Hinduism, Christianity, and Kabir's philosophy about God. He described rites, rituals, and culture of these three major religions and his mastery over the language that has made the novel, God's Little Solider, meant to be readable. Author has explored violence and obsessive faith of

contemporary society both in its outward manifestation in the form of global terrorism and extremism existence in the minds of today's restless and violence prone-generation.

3.4 SUGGESTED QUESTION

1. Who is the author of the book God's Little Solider?
2. Who is the Indian writer of the literary canon?
3. If in the given story you had to look to someone who would you look up to?
4. Describe the theme of the story and the moral?
5. What are religious extremists in the given story ?

3.5 REFERENCE

GOD'S LITTLE SOIDIER BY KIRAN NAGARKAR BOOK

http;//www.languageinindia.com

4

CRITICAL STUDY OF RUPA BAJWA'S THE SARI SHOP - PART I

Unit Structure:

4.0 Objectives

4.1 Rupa Bajwa

4.2 *The Sari Shop*

4.3 Characters

4.0 OBJECTIVES

This unit discusses Rupa Bajwa's *The Sari Shop* which deals the simple story of one of the most popular cities of India, Amritsar. It presents background, content, Characters, themes and criticism about the novel.

4.1 RUPA BAJWA

Rupa Bajwa, contemporary Indian author in English was born in 1977 in Armitsar, Punjab. Her debut novel, *The Sari Shop* (2004) was nominated for the Orange Prize for Fiction 2004. Her novel brings forth the realistic world which includes us as well. She is an awardee of the Grinzane Cavour Prize (2005), the Commonwealth Award (2005) and India's Sahitya Akademi Award (2006). She explores her hometown, Amritsar and the class dynamics of India in her novel, *The Sari Shop*. The novel is translated into many languages which include French, Portuguese, Italian, Dutch, Greek and Spanish.

4.2 THE SARI SHOP

Rupa Bajwa brings to the light the story of Indian society through the characters from different states, classes and stratas of life. She voices Indian women, their lifestyles and challenges they need to face. As Anita Looma says Indian feminism has multiple dimensions as Indian society, these dimensions can be witnessed in *The Sari Shop*. The major as well as the minor characters are connected with the sari shop where the protagonist, Ramchand works. Rupa Bajwa intertwines the story along with how the sari shop. She informs about shop's sales, varieties of silk-threaded draperies and the several customers especially, females and their choices of the saries which highlight their social, financial and familial backgrounds. The novel provides the deep insight in the characters' lives. It projects the female's world, her agonies, sufferings, desires, emotions, expectations and experiences through a simple traditional attire, Sari. While purchasing saries females from different classes enter shop and discuss their ideas about fabric, colour and designs which defines their characters. Rupa Bajwa presents a plain, simple-minded, lonely hero with a poignant past who is

advised by a mature family man, and a quick-witted carefree boy named, Hari who has been presented as extremely adorable and cheerful; just like a comedian. Ramchand loses his family at very tender age. And after the death of his paternal uncle, he starts to work and live in Amritsar. He loves to learn English as he visits a royal customers like professor and Kapoor's family. Rupa Bajwa also focuses on how her minor characters like Tina, Lakhan Singh and his wife and their influence on protagonist's life.

The story starts when Ramchand oversleept and woke up when the loud noises of a brawl in the street disturbed his sleep. He got out of bed and peered through the rusted iron bars of window to find the source of noise. A milkman quarreled with a pedestrian as one of his milkcan got bumped into the pedestrian and got empty on the narrow street. Ramchand watched the fight to its end. He got so engrossed in witnessing the fight that he forgot to watch the time. On the cold morning he felt his limbs and mind both were frozen. But soon he realized he was late for the work. He got ready hurriedly by dropping things all over the place. He threw the things carelessy which made his accommodation messy, lumsy and unkept like his life. He rushed out of his room and made his way towards the shop.. He could feel his toes perspiring inside his grey woollen socks. Even at ten in the morning, the bazaar was throbbing with activity. The halwai was already installed in front of the Mishthaan Sweet Shop, pressing jalebi batter into squiggly shapes that floated and simmered in the oil in a big iron cauldron. All the shops had opened for the day and, Ramchand noted guiltily, all the shop assistants were already in place, trying to sell things with fixed, attentive smiles on their shiny, bathed faces. The older part of Amritsar, the original walled city, was full of bazaars — small ones that only the locals knew about, tiny bazaars that sold bangles and cloth very cheap but could be reached only on foot through tiny alleys; and the big, main bazaars where the streets were wider and the roads slightly cleaner. The bazaars of Amritsar were busy places where every day, throughout the year, transactions were made, prices were bargained over, shops were opened in the mornings and shut in the evenings. There were no empty spaces in the market. It looked like maze network of lanes and alleys and short cuts in the old city. The shop where Ramchand worked was one of the oldest in the city, tucked neatly between Talwaar Furnishings and Draperies and Chanduram's Fabrics. It was in one of the main bazaars, buried away in the heart of the city, yet with parking space for customers who came in cars. In this bazaar the shops were larger, older, with good reputations and old, regular customers, and the shop owners were all considered respectable people from old business families. A large fading green signboard over the entrance of the shop said Sevak Sari House in flourishing red letters in old-fashioned calligraphy, both in English and Punjabi. The signboard was slightly misleading. The shop did not just sell saris. The ground floor stocked fabric for men's clothes as well. There were dreary browns, blues and blacks here. But very few people visited Sevak Sari House to buy Men's Suitings and Shirtings. There were other, larger shops that had a wider range devoted entirely to men — the Raymond showroom two lanes away, for instance. So the ground floor of the shop wore a dusty, jaded look. It was the first floor of the shop that sold saris. Packed from shelf to shelf with crisp Bangladeshi cottons, dazzling Kanjeevarams, Benaras silks, chiffons, crepes and satins, it was the first

floor that pulsated with an intoxicating, rich life of colour and silk and brought in the customers and profits. And it was because of the huge success of the first floor that Sevak Sari House had been known for decades as the best sari shop in Amritsar. The suiting and shirting cut-pieces in the ground floor cowered under the sparkling, confident dazzle above. There was also a second floor that customers never saw. It contained a big storeroom and a small toilet that was used by Mahajan and the shop assistants. Ramchand was one of the six shop assistants who worked in the sari section. Ramchand stood uncertainly at the entrance of the shop, his palms cold with sweat despite the chilly December morning, thinking of Mahajan's rage that would soon descend on him. Ramchand peered in. Mahajan was talking to somebody over the phone. Making the best of it, Ramchand sprinted across the ground floor under Mahajan's disapproving eyes. There was a Ganesha idol installed near the foot of the staircase that led up to the first floor to which he used to pray but that he hudt escaped with praying. Any moment Mahajan would stop him and give him a dressing down. But he climbed up to the first floor safely. In the small space on top of the staircase, and in the front of the big glass door that led into the sari section, he tried to get his breath back. But the noise and commotions he made drew Mahajan's attentions as a result Mahajan taunted him. He went to his allotted place and sat down cross-legged. The shop was an old-fashioned one and there were no counters. The entire floor space was spread out with thick mattresses covered with white sheets, and on these mattresses sat the shop assistants every day, facing the customers, and endlessly rolling and unrolling yards upon yards of important coloured fabric. Hari laughed at Mahajan's taunt to Ramchand and comforted him. Hari was the youngest among all the shop assistants. He was a careless, cheerful, young man with a cheeky face, who often got shouted at by Mahajan. However, unlike the effect they had on Ramchand, these unpleasant encounters always left Hari completely unfazed. In fact, on slightly dull days, they even cheered him up. Gokul sat placidly folding some saris into neat rectangles. He was in charge of very expensive crêpes, and in the wedding season he also helped with ornate wedding lehngas and saris. He was a grave-looking man in his forties who took his work very seriously. Mahajan thought a great deal of his experience and his sincerity, but this still didn't save Gokul from occasional tongue lashes from Mahajan. About ten years back, Sevak Sari House had also decided to stock chunnis. For there were many Sardaarnis from old Sikh families, matriarchs as well as young women, who came in to buy saris and asked hopefully whether they had chunnis as well. For them, saris were necessary, they were fashionable, but their real clothes were salwaar kameez. And so, after many of them had wistfully enquired about chunnis, saying that Sevak Sari House was so dependable, and that it was so difficult to get really good quality stuff in chunnis these days, Bhimsen and Mahajan had put their heads together and had decided to stock chunnis too. And Gokul had made it his business to know his chunnis very well. There were no ordinary chunnis in Sevak Sari House. They sold saris, so if some chunnis had to be there, they had to be special. All of them were two and a half metres in length, and of the required width. No welldressed sardaarni liked a chunni shorter or narrower than that; they thought that those kind of chunnis were for Hindu women or for very young girls. Apart from the

length, the quality was taken care of. There were pure chiffon chunnis, there were lovely white silk chunnis that could be dyed to match any silk salwaar kameez, there were gold-edged bridal odhnis in red, pink and maroon, there were white chunnis with discreet light-coloured embroidery at the borders for widows from good families, there were the colourful ones embroidered with traditional phulkari work — usually bought by Sikh women for their daughters' trousseau, and many others. And Gokul could handle all the customers who came in asking for chunnis. Despite this, Gokul didn't swagger. He was in awe of Mahajan and was always warning Hari to be careful not to get into Mahajan's bad books. Gokul now looked up at Hari and said, 'You be quiet, Hari! Calling Mahajan a raakshas at the top of your voice! You talk too much. Some day they will hear you and chuck you out. You have too long a tongue. That tongue won't earn you your living, boy.' But Gokul was smiling when he said this. He had a small, benign face and a dome-shaped head sparsely covered with wisps of hair. Ramchand also gave him a wan smile. Chander was unlocking a cupboard nearby. All the walls of the shop were either covered with shelves, or had sturdy built-in cupboards that could be locked up with the more expensive or delicate stock inside. While the three were talking, Chander didn't even look up once. He was a quiet man, very tall, and with a very pronounced Adam's apple. He often did not turn up for work, and maintained a melancholic silence whenever Mahajan shouted at him for this or for any other reason. He would just take in all the insults Mahajan hurled at him, staring into space all the while, biting his lower lip, not answering any of Mahajan's angry questions. The two oldest shop assistants, Shyam and Rajesh, had been working at Sevak Sari House for a much longer time than any of the others. Shyam had greying hair, a thin face and a large gap between his two front teeth. Rajesh was plump, with slightly rheumy eyes. The two kept to themselves, confabulating in low voices about the rising prices, nought per cent interest home loans and where you could get the best bargains for household electrical appliances. They were paid slightly more than all the other shop assistants. Everyone knew this, but it was never mentioned, and the two men never admitted it officially. Shyam had a young daughter he was hoping to marry off to Rajesh's son. They lived in their own set, middle-aged world, went out for tea and meals together, and called all the other shop assistants 'boys', even Gokul, who was only a few years younger than them. The Sari Shop revolves around the anxieties of Ramchand, a lowly shop assistant at Sevak Sari House in Amritsar. Ramchand was not born poor. His parents are killed in an accident and he is brought up by his uncle. Ramchand spent the morning arranging new stock. Bhimsen Seth, the owner of the shop, came in at about eleven. The shop had been set up by his grandfather, Sevak Ram. Bhimsen had taken over at the age of twenty. That was when a fifteen-year-old Mahajan had come to him looking for work. Bhimsen had taken him in, and Mahajan had worked his way up in the business. He had, over thirty years, proved himself to be honest, reliable, enterprising and a hard taskmaster. Now it was Mahajan who looked after most of the practical affairs of the shop, though under Bhimsen's supervision. Most of the time now, Bhimsen Seth didn't need to come to the shop every day. He had some other businesses running that he also had to see to. Ramchand didn't know whether Seth was his surname or if it was just a respectful way of addressing

him. He had asked Gokul once, but Gokul didn't know either, and Ramchand didn't dare to ask anyone else. On the rare occasions that Bhimsen Seth did come to the shop, he just reclined prosperously in a corner of the first floor, surrounded by a garish assortment of pictures of Hindu Gods, burning incense sticks and greedily counting hundred rupee notes with his thick, stubby fingers. Ramchand watched him out of the corner of his eye sometimes. Bhimsen would intently flip the edges of the notes, and, if he happened to look up and catch Ramchand's eye, he would give him a slow, fleshy smile that chilled Ramchand's heart. He always found Bhimsen's benevolent manner a little sinister.

Coincidentally, this could be the perfect account of the first part of the novel, that too, in the author's own words. The Sari Shop revolves around the anxieties of Ramchand, a lowly shop assistant at Sevak Sari House in Amritsar. Ramchand was not born poor. His parents are killed in an accident and he is brought up by his uncle. As soon as Ramchand is old enough to fend for himself his uncle finds him a job as a shop assistant where he is condemned to a life of ennui and drudgery and far from the education he craves so much. But all this changes suddenly when he is dispatched to the rich, English-speaking Kapoor household to deliver saris and fabrics for the daughter's trousseau. Seeing them converse in English, Ramchand's passion gets rekindled and he buys himself a second-hand grammar book, an Oxford Dictionary, a fresh pair of socks and a bar of Lifebuoy soap. These four things, he is convinced, will give him the kind of life he has wanted since childhood. • The novel captures the essence of Amritsar with all its gossip, its alleys, its busy bazaars, its eateries, mannerisms and its petty rivalries among the rich and bored women. Ramchad, a shop assistant in Sevak Sari House in Amritsar, spends his days patiently showing yards of fabric to the women of "status families" and to the giggling girls who dream of dressing up in silk but can only afford cotton. When Ramchand is sent to a new part of the city to show wares to a wealthy family preparing for their daughter's wedding, he is jolted out of the rhythm of his narrow daily life. His glimpse into a different world gives him an urgent sense of possibility. He begins to see himself, his life, and his future more clearly. And so he attempts to recapture the hope that his childhood had promised, arming himself with two battered English grammar books, a fresh pair of socks, and a bar of Lifebuoy soap. But soon these efforts turn his life upside down, bringing him face to face with the cruelties on which his very existence depends. A poignant tale of a sari shop, its customers and more importantly the salesmen and their lives. Ramchand is a timid young man who goes about doing his job quietly and trying to fulfill his dead parents' ambition of learning English. He buys books to teach himself English and feels he has died and gone to heaven when he is sent to the Kapoor Mansion to hawk saris. Alas! He also sees the wretchedness that is his co-worker Chander's life. Tragedy makes him erupt into an angry young man but only till his anger is dissipated - a few days and life is back to 'normal."

4.3 CHARACTERS

The Sari Shop revolves around Ramchand a salesperson at a sari shop in the old area of Amritsar. Ramchand's life is chronicled and interwoven with

stories and tidbits from the lives of others around him. Ramchand and his colleagues wait on the richest and the most powerful ladies in Amritsar who choose to come to this sari shop for the variety and quality that it promises. From university professors who look down upon money, and rich business people who look down on people who may not have the kind of money they had. The Sevak Sari Shop attracted all sorts. They have a strict task master of a boss called Mahajan who used to ensure that they catered to all the customers in the best way they could. Ramchand lost his parents, who he adored and looked up to, in an accident when he was very young. He is brought up by his uncle and aunt. As he grows up, he realizes that he has been cheated by his uncle of the shop that his father owned and the jewelery that his mother owned. He is left with nothing. His uncle gets him at apprenticeship at the sari shop and that is where he stayed. He remembered how his father used to want that his son to learn English. He realizes that people who know English have an edge, and so he starts his journey to self-improvement. He picks up second-hand letter writing books, a dictionary and works hard at it even when in most cases, the context itself is not very clear to him. What I really loved about the book is the way the author describes things in the book. Right from the way the old market area in Amritsar is set up, to Ramchand's sensitivity is beautifully portrayed. Ramchand's amazement when he sees women wearing the sarees that they bought at the shop. For some reason he had never put it together that people wear the expensive sarees they buy to functions and weddings. Instances of how the sales people at the shops are considered invisible or non-existent by the customers as they talk and gossip away while browsing through the saris. The rich-poor divide is well brought out. Ramchand is easily affected by the others around him. Even a scolding from Mahajan for coming late has quite an impact on him. One day he unwittingly comes across some issues which he initially ignores and later his conscience prevents him from ignoring and carrying on with his life. Things come to a head when lives across the spectrum of society clash in a way which most of them would have never anticipated.. The ending especially is poignant and makes one wonder at how different people come to terms with what life offers them. The book has several stories, intricately woven into one. It was a 4/5 read for me. There was something that was missing from making it a completely wonderful read, for me.

Characterization of the Novel Sari Shop Rupa Bajwa's "The Sari Shop" set in the little city of Amritsar captures evocatively, the social atmosphere of small-town India. Her narrative encapsulates the spirit of the sari-shop environment with its spirited, intimate, interaction between shop personnel and regular patrons. In the background, the rustling silk, soft cotton and shiny synthetic saris reach out to us so realistically that we long to hold and caress them in our hands. Apart from that, the unplumbed pathos of Ramchand, an assistant in Sevak Sari Shop, whose world revolves around selling saris to the women customers, deadens our heart with sorrow. Ramchand's life and his isolation in the indifferent world are effortlessly carved out in fine detail. Is it surprising then, we are drawn to empathize with his empty, monotonous existence? Ramachand's loss of his doting parents at a tender age is very moving. He is forced into menial work by his uncle who grabbed his inheritance. His desire to master English language is

noteworthy, as it is rekindled one day, when he is sent to display sarees for the trousseau of a wealthy man's daughter. Suddenly, his life seems to acquire a purpose as he meticulously sets about learning new English words from "Radiant Essays" and "A Complete Writer" assisted by an old Oxford English dictionary. As he reads, he seems to grasp the meaning of his life and the avidity of life around him. It was a sad moment, when he began to understand the pathos of the underdog and the aggression of the conqueror; in this case the one on top of the social hierarchy. The transformation in Ramachand is to make him humane to the hurts of society and the woes of the secondary sex, women. Kamala, the wife of another sari shop assistant Chander, inadvertently opens his eyes to the double standards lived by men in the patriarchal society. At the end of it, Ramachand realizes the futility of trying to turn the system around and instead, finds comfort in lapsing into his routine existence. Our journey is outward with Ramachand, into the stagnant, oppressive social system and inward with him into his suffocating, futile ruminations. I could only throw up my hands in utter despair, at the futility of it all, when nothing materialized. I wished that Ramachand would have persevered. The characterization in the novel I feel is pertinent to the trivial rivalries that seethe beneath the surface of life lived by petty traders and class-conscious, middleclass wives. The wives of rich industrialists with their empty lives and the educated class with their snobbish intellectualism, is skillfully caricatured. The lives of the lower middle class, their resigned acceptance of poverty, their escape into filmi world and their aspirations to higher things through English speaking jobs, brought a lump into my throat due to the streak of desperation that intertwined hope. It is one of the comical moments in the novel as, when Hari, another shop assistant imitates the portly shop owner or when Ramachand sneaks into the wealthy wedding reception to taste the forty desserts set out on the table or his surprise when he sees all the women customers and the sarees from the shop on them. Ramachand's sensual day dreams revolving around Sudha, the young wife of his landlord or see him ticking off his shop manager in a perfectly structured droll English or view his attempts to combat his smelly feet with lemon juice. It is laughter mixed with pathos, when Rina interviews Ramachand to exploit his naïve, comical appeal in her debut novel, while Ramachand imagines himself as suave with Rina. Is it not utter duplicity of the world where law exists for the rich while the poor timidly accept injustice? The brutal rape of Kamala, the involvement of the rich Guptas, the apathy of the educated, articulate and empowered Mrs Sachadeva, the police who pocket the bribe and punish the victim, the anguish of Ramachand who is just a bystander, left a lasting impression on me. Ramachand's new found perception, battles to bring some order into the skewered justice system in the society. His sanity rightfully takes a beating, withdraws into insanity with the intensity of its demoralization and returns to the present deceitful world to maintain its status quo. Ramachand's efforts, even though brief, to challenge the social hierarchical system of rich and poor are very nicely projected . Ramachand's attempts to imbue his life with some imagination and beauty by buying English books and trying to educate himself is very moving. At that particular moment, The novel is very perceptive in giving a social commentary of the society which reflects the existentialist torment of every human creature. At the same time, there

is a fine balance between reality and expectation, as the incongruities of life is deftly woven into the story. It is alos darkly humorous as it effortlessly drew into the lives of the characters as they go about their business of living. Without our volition the author makes us to empathize with Kamala or Ramachand or sneer at the hollowness of Rina or Mrs Sachadeva. It may not possible to break out of our boundaries or change the world around us but sometimes it is necessary to just try and understand ourselves and our life.

Bajwa dramatically illustrates the class gap in contemporary India. She focuses on Ramchand, a lowly, disaffected clerk in a popular sari shop. The novel opens with Ramchand happily going about his duties serving the shop's mostly upper-class clients. Opportunity for advancement comes from an unlikely source when he attracts the attention of the beautiful, literate Rina Kapoor, whose family hires the shop to provide saris for her upcoming wedding. Inspired by his foray into a wider world ("there were cars and flowerpots and frosted glass trays with peacocks on them"), Ramchand embarks on a half-baked self-improvement effort that includes a reading program and some unintentionally comic attempts to learn English. Shortly afterwards, though, Ramchand sees the other side of Indian life when the wife of one of his co-workers, a woman named Kamla, descends into public drunkenness. Ramchand is a tenderly drawn character, reminiscent of Naipaul's innocent strivers, and the rest of the cast is vividly sketched. There are several typical first-novel flaws: the narrative is slow in the first half, and Bajwa's transitions between her character-driven subplots are occasionally uneven and erratic. But Bajwa's loving attention to detail—Ramchand washing his feet with lemon juice before he visits the Kapoors, the malicious chatter of the sari-shopping ladies—paints a compelling, acerbic picture of urban India. The Sevak Sari House in Bajwa's resonant first novel is a microcosm of its surrounding town, Amritsar, and perhaps of all of India. Ramchand, a shop assistant, seems content selling saris to wealthy matrons and their daughters. But when he is sent to the opulent home of the Kapoors with stacks of saris for them to scrutinize, he experiences his first hints of discontent. Vowing to educate himself to better his place in society, Ramchand purchases some used grammar books and a dictionary, through which he plods in his off hours. He is brought back to reality when he is again sent outside the shop, this time to a co-worker's shack. Stunned by the poverty and degradation he finds there, Ramchand plunges into a deep depression over the world's inequities. After a brief and courageous outburst aimed at his higher-ups, he retreats to his old compliant self, stuck in a rut that is at least secure. Biting humor, perceptive social commentary, and the poetic telling of a poignant tale combine for an exceptional debut. Ramchand has obediently worked as a clerk at the Sevak Sari House in the city of Amritsar, India for eleven years; alternating his time between the Sari shop located in the city's old bazaar and his one room apartment with minimal possessions. His simple life, however, takes a drastic turn when he is ordered to take a selection of saris by bicycle to a prosperous family who is preparing for their eldest daughter's wedding. Upon entering this strange new world of extravagant automobiles, air conditioning, servants, and wall-to-wall plush carpet Ramchand's mind goes in a tailspin. He has never encountered such luxury

before and is deeply affected. From this point forward Ramchand's consciousness is awakened to the issues of class that surround him in his everyday life. He becomes interested in the lives of the various women who visit the sari shop and listen to their conversations revealing their affluent life-styles and snobbery attitudes towards others. At the same time, and also at the other end of the class spectrum, he becomes acquainted with the dire situation of his co-worker and his wife who reside in a tin shack in a poor section of the city. Ramchand's experiences quickly led him into a dizzying philosophical journey with potential serious ramifications for many.

Rupa Bajwa's *The Sari Shop* turns the world of a small shop in Amritsar, India, into a microcosm of the society, allowing the author to explore big ideas within an intimate environment. Exploring the lives of ordinary shop salesmen, both at home and at work, as they struggle to make ends meet, she juxtaposes them against some of their wealthy clients, highlighting dramatically the economic contrasts in their lives and the differences in their expectations. From her opening description of the raucous awakening of a small neighborhood, she presents the kinds of homely details which make the setting easy to visualize, despite the cultural differences. Ramchand, now twenty-six, has been working as an assistant at the Sevak Sari House since he was fifteen, doing the same job day after day, going to a small dhaba with some of the other assistants for something to eat at night and sometimes to the movies. He has little hope of improving his station and, with his parents dead and no family in the city, little opportunity to meet a marriageable young woman or change his lonely life. Through flashbacks, the reader learns about Ramchand's family background and how he came to live alone in Amritsar. As Bajwa slowly draws the reader into the lives of other characters, the reader empathizes with them. Kamla, the wife of Chander, another of the shop assistants, is an especially pathetic case, a young woman who has been victimized by society, her husband, and her husband's former employers. Rina Kapoor, daughter of the wealthiest man in Amritsar, however, is also, in some ways, a victim of her economic situation, as are the women for whom shopping for saris is a primary activity. Only a few women here seek independent lives, these being women for whom it is an option because of their economic privilege. Kamla has no such options. When the lives of Ramchand, Kamla, Rina, and Chander intersect in a shocking climax, lives change forever. The stunning ending is melodramatic, and Ramchand's change of character may not be completely realistic, but the story moves effectively from its quiet character study at the beginning into a compelling story of characters whose lives overlap, often unwittingly. Sometimes darkly humorous, the story has considerable charm because Ramchand himself inspires empathy. Intimate and thoughtful in its depiction of the various social strata which make up the community, the novel is more understated—less sensational and less political—than some of the more panoramic epics which have come from India in the past decade. Mary Whipple. There is an endless supply of narratives portraying the class inequalities in contemporary Indian life. Few of them have made it into the hands of western English readers. It is a treat that this one has overcome the narrowness of western ethnocentricity to give us an insight into the world of modern Indian culture. Rupa Bajwa opens the window for us to see the world she was born and raised in. While not biographical, it is still first-

hand. We see a world of rich, deep culture. We witness a society at the crossroads of modernity and inescapable prejudice. It is not, at its core, a sad or tragic story. Neither is it a story inciting change to the established order. But it is an insight into the complex nature of the Indian psyche that must be unraveled and attempts made to resolve it before this nation can join the club of first world nations. Her imagination, vulnerability, and even her weaknesses are cause to want to read on to the end. It is because she is not yet refined that the reader extends her grace and continues on to learn what she has to say and see where her characters go

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5

CRITICAL STUDY OF RUPA BAJWA'S THE SARI SHOP - PART II

Unit Structure:

5.1 Objectives

5.2 Introduction

5.3 Themes

5.4 The Sari Shop – Concept of Feminism

5.5 Psychological Study

5.4 Questions

5.5 Reference for further study

5.1 OBJECTIVES

This unit discusses Rupa Bajwa's *The Sari Shop* which deals the simple story of one of the most popular cities of India, Amritsar. It presents background, content, Characters, themes and criticism about the novel.

5.2 INTRODUCTION

5.3 THEMES

Theme

Corruption is the theme that runs through two recent novels set in contemporary India *The Sari Shop* novel features lower middle class protagonists with limited education, in North Indian settings where the struggle for upward mobility is the defining quest. Despite significant overlaps in the cultural territory they explore and the conclusion it reaches, however Bajwa offers interesting and instructive contrasts in perspective. Bajwa is the native born and bred in India. Rupa Bajwa's protagonist in The Sari Shop Ramchand is the eternal man on the margin. Orphaned at a young age and rendered asunder from the fabric of family that supports Indian society, his work restricts him to the feminized, seemingly innocuous arena of the small town sari shop where he is a salesman. The Sevak Sari House is the narrow oblique lens through which he, with the reader, views

contemporary North India. There are the customers, ladies of leisure from Amritsar's elite families and then there is the lower middle class existence of Ramchand and his colleagues. Like AOF, the precise and inescapable gradations of class (and implicitly caste) and power configure the arena of possibilities in The Sari Shop like the struggle for upward mobility provides the motive force. Bajwa's Ramchand is naïve and perhaps more pertinently, young. His path of self-improvement takes him through English essay books. But for all of Ramchand's comic efforts, there is horror also at the end of the The Sari Shop - in the rape of Kamla, the wretched wife of one of his colleagues, Ramchand sees the consequences of challenging the social order. The surfaces of this world may seem smooth but the edges are jagged. The Kamla episode has been described by many reviewers as 'melodramatic' and implausible but in fact it is no more than the stuff of numerous newspaper headlines brought home. Read together with Sharma's more polished novel, The Sari Shop thus yields an interesting counterpoint. In The Sari Shop the personal becomes political. In both the iniquities of the public sphere cannot be escaped. Bajwa can offer the possibility of salvation for their characters. Ramchand survives by an equally terrible anaesthetization of sensibility. In Ramchand's (and Bajwa's) Amritsar occasionally the sun shines down 'gently on him, with pleasant warmth'. As *The Sari Shop* progresses, these moments prove to be deceptive. In The Sari Shop Ramchand's attempt to draw a seemingly sympathetic and enlightened college professor into condemning the incarceration and rape of Kamla are met with frank hostility. Yet Ramchand's own breakdown and horror at Kamla's fate undermines the conspiracy of silence that surrounds it.

In the cultural landscape of Bajwa's novel the things that money can buy command a similar ascendancy in social relations - it is significant that its central arena is a shop. In the friendship of the Mrs. Sandhu, the government servant's wife and Mrs. Gupta, the businessman's, Bajwa hints at the oily nexus of corruption. The Sari Shop may be far removed from the hurly burly of public life but there is no doubt that its innocence is contaminated; and in time and unlike AOF, Ramchand comes to be the witness of that taint. Ramchand's perspective can most accurately be described as the 'critical insider', a term first used by distinguished Kannada writer U.R. Ananthamurthy. In allowing Ramchand the outsider's viewpoint and leaving some spaces uninfected by the malaise of apathy, Bajwa also opens up space for survival.

The Sari Shop can be read as the insider's passage from ignorance to bitter knowledge. There is no forgiveness here either but there is the terrible grace of insight. Bajwa's characters may be no more able to change the direction of the world or even of their lives. But continuity is made possible precisely by the brief periods when they see through the systemic violence. A gem of a novel about the stuff life’s made of Rupa Bajwa’s *The Sari Shop* is a poignant novel enhanced by its clearly etched out and identifiable stereotypical characters. The story revolves around Ramchand, an assistant in Sevak Sari Shop who goes about his humdrum life, mostly selling saris to wealthy clients who visit the store. The vivid illustration of the city of Amritsar with its gamut of people and places is indeed very compelling. The

book also clearly brings out the class differences prevalent even in modern day India. The simplicity and palpability of the story are its major strengths.

5.4 THE SARI SHOP — CONCEPT OF FEMINISM

Rupa Bajwa's "The Sari Shop" set in the little city of Amritsar captures evocatively, the social atmosphere of small-town India. Her narrative encapsulates the spirit of the sari-shop environment with its spirited, intimate, interaction between shop personnel and regular patrons. In the background, the rustling silk, soft cotton and shiny synthetic saris reach out to us so realistically that we long to hold and caress them in our hands. Apart from that, the unplumbed pathos of Ramchand, an assistant in Sevak Sari Shop, whose world revolves around selling saris to the women customers, deadens our heart with sorrow. Ramchand's life and his isolation in the indifferent world are effortlessly carved out in fine detail. Is it surprising then, we are drawn to empathize with his empty, monotonous existence? Ramchand's loss of his doting parents at a tender age is very moving. He is forced into menial work by his uncle who grabbed his inheritance. His desire to master English language is noteworthy, as it is rekindled one day, when he is sent to display sarees for the trousseau of a wealthy man's daughter. Suddenly, his life seems to acquire a purpose as he meticulously sets about learning new English words from "Radiant Essays" and "A Complete Writer" assisted by an old Oxford English dictionary. As he reads, he seems to grasp the meaning of his life and the avidity of life around him. It was a sad moment, when he began to understand the pathos of the underdog and the aggression of the conqueror; in this case the one on top of the social hierarchy. The transformation in Ramchand is to make him humane to the hurts of society and the woes of the secondary sex, women. Kamala, the wife of another sari shop assistant Chander, inadvertently opens his eyes to the double standards lived by men in the patriarchal society. At the end of it, Ramchand realizes the futility of trying to turn the system around and instead, finds comfort in lapsing into his routine existence. Our journey is outward with Ramchand, into the stagnant, oppressive social system and inward with him into his suffocating, futile ruminations. I could only throw up my hands in utter despair, at the futility of it all, when nothing materialized. I wished that Ramchand would have persevered. The characterization in the novel I feel is pertinent to the trivial rivalries that seethe beneath the surface of life lived by petty traders and class-conscious, middle-class wives. The wives of rich industrialists with their empty lives and the educated class with their snobbish intellectualism, is skillfully caricatured. The lives of the lower middle class, their resigned acceptance of poverty, their escape into filmy world and their aspirations to higher things through English speaking jobs, brought a lump into my throat due to the streak of desperation that intertwined hope. I found wonderfully comical moments in the novel as, when Hari, another shop assistant imitates the portly shop owner or when Ramchand sneaks into the wealthy wedding reception to taste the forty desserts set out on the table or his surprise when he sees all the women customers and the sarees from the shop on them. The laugh aloud moments are, when I took in the spiteful chatter of the ladies on a saree buying spree or observe Ramchand's sensual day dreams

revolving around Sudha, the young wife of his landlord or see him ticking off his shop manager in a perfectly structured droll English or view his attempts to combat his smelly feet with lemon juice. It is laughter mixed with pathos, when Rina interviewing Ramchand to exploit his naïve, comical appeal in her debut novel, while Ramchand imagines himself as suave with Rina. Is it not utter duplicity of the world where law exists for the rich while the poor timidly accept injustice? The brutal rape of Kamala, the involvement of the rich Guptas, the apathy of the educated, articulate and empowered Mrs Sachdeva, the police who pocket the bribe and punish the victim, the anguish of Ramchand who is just a bystander, left a lasting impression on me. Ramchand's new found perception, battles to bring some order into the skewered justice system in the society. His sanity rightfully takes a beating, withdraws into insanity with the intensity of its demoralization and returns to the present deceitful world to maintain its status quo. Ramchand's efforts, even though brief, to challenge the social hierarchical system of rich and poor. Ramchand's attempts to imbue his life with some imagination and beauty by buying English books and trying to educate himself is very moving

Rupa Bajwa has woven an intricate tale of the protagonist Ramchand trying to lift himself from the dregs of his lonely existence, by engaging with the people he meets on a more real level. Unfortunately he finds the phrase “two sides of the coin” to be true to almost all situations in life, where hope and desperation co-exist. Ramchand is ‘everyman’-living in a small tenement in one of the by lanes of Amritsar. The contrasting strands of the life of the privileged and the plodding existence of the poor are like the weft and weave of the saris that are sold by Ramchand. Somehow threads interweave to create saris but a few crystals sewn in, or a shot of sari woven through can make a dramatic difference. It almost seems that Ramchand will lighten his dark lonely days with his efforts at self improvement. Ramchand for all his feeling of being unschooled, has studied that special language that women speak when they shop and is good at his job at the Sevak Sari House. He is inspired to make a few changes to his dull existence after a glimpse into the life of the rich. But the consequences are quite the opposite! Ms. Bajwa has a crafted an honest narrative of a town in modern India, replete with the heartbreak of humdrum existence. Feminist enterprise has been so far a long struggle to universalize female behaviour, their common tales of woe and sufferings under realms of patriarchy and male oppression. Be it a question of rewriting of male texts or parametering of social structure, the set pattern of feminist view point has been struggle against androcentric ethics and female sensitivity in bonding, analysing and understanding each other universally. Nowhere have women been set against women, only men have been peeled, chopped and even roasted in certain instances. In Indian context, the fashion in writing and criticism, pertains to this noveau feminism in vocal, visual and literary form. Rupa Bajwa, the young girl from Amritsar and brave I must say, has dare set in a different view point with her text, The Sari Shop. The title itself is a potent symbol of Indian womanhood and all traditional and modern idiosyncrasies associated with it. This is Rupa Bajwa’s debut work, and she bangs in a time when Jhumpa Lahiri, Shani Motoo, Anita Nair and other young brigade is all over the

scene. But she has a different identity of a small town like Amritsar, an image like Sari to unfurl, and a separate story than immigrant culture tale, and a separate woman to portray- an Indian woman, a wounded woman, a raped woman, a woman who dares against women, woman who assumes the status of an actual heroine/ role model when she pulls down glitters from fabrics of rich and suave feminist minds by poking fun at their miserableness of being hollow inside. Bajwa has presented in all its nakedness the common psychic inheritance of Indians' regarding women and the psychic makeup of women in general. The continuous assessment all over the world has been of women as important as men but no evaluation of women' position in society with other women. The enigma of plural societies like India, which face more social, political and cultural cleavages, is complex and uneasy to differentiate. The feminisation of media especially T.V. has brought a new cult of upper upper or upper middle class bourgeois woman, obliterating our mind of the crude statistics of women facing unto untouchability, oppression, below poverty line (bpl status), unemployment graphs, illiteracy or ignorance factors, rising suicides, molestation, violence, rape etc The embellished make believe world has bypassed our awareness of internal and external social system in terms of caste, creed, race, colour, ethnicity, religion and now with emerging social class. Though class in Indian context is not a new signifier, but Is the Indian writer in English especially woman writer aware of interclass struggle, class division, class oppression, class consciousness and class solidarity among women themselves? The uniformity of biological status among women can't ignore rational, social, political and economic differences, where she is a different class from the other. So, there are 'fault lines' emerging among perceived feminist notions and theories, the fancied 'equality manifesto' not with men but with women in general seems itself 'unequal' in theory and reality. The Sari Shop is a work where representations of different Indian woman is given due analyses on the basis of numerous hybrid and heterogeneous class groups. The rationalisation of status and class adds to discrimination between and women and women and is discussed in terms of dominant and subordinate category. Frank Parkin has observed in the book 'Sociology of Gender': "For the great majority of women the allocation of social and economical rewards is determined primarily by the position of their families and, in particular, that of the male head. Although women today share certain status attributes in common, simply by virtue of their sex, their claims over resources are not primarily determined by their own occupation but, more commonly, by that of their fathers or husbands. And if the wives and daughters of unskilled labourers have something in common with the wives and daughters of wealthy landowners, there can be no doubt that the differences in their overall situation are far more striking and significant. Only if the disabilities attaching to female status were felt to be so great as to override differences of a class kind would it be realistic to regard sex as an important dimension of stratification." The delineated female characters in Sari Shop are better halves of someone rich and famous or somebody affluent and known. They are no entities in themselves. The novelist has called them all Mrs Sachdeva/ Kapoor/ Bhandari/ Gupta or the other. They have no name and identity of their own. It is all borrowed from husband's hierarchy and tradition. The feminist concern should embark on this hired

'image-identity bargain' of upper-upper class woman. For Kamla, the drunk, mad , ruffian sari assistant Chander's wife the title is not Mrs. Chander anywhere but Chander's wife or that charred Kamla, 'the mad woman in the attic' kind. Bajwa introduces a gallery of female characters, all distinct and apart in style, language, mannerism, ideology and in particular how they choose a sari, admire its texture, colour and fabric and fancy it wearing them. Mrs Sandhu wife of a chief engineer in Punjab State Electricity Board , epitomises 'power psychology' "as her rolls of fat jiggled as she waddled" into her spotless house, furnished with latest gadgetry and fashionable architectural feature. Her picture perfect frame is summed up as " A beautiful house, status family, a caring husband and good looks... what more could a woman ask for." Mrs Gupta the wife of a wealthy industrialist sits in her bedroom on a large bed covered with a peach satin bedspread, reminding of the "burnished throne" (A game of chess, The Waste land, T.S. Eliot). Her unusual, 'perky' and 'over confident manner' smelled through her room beaming of various loreal cosmetics, lakme, and her recent venture with feng shui, established her as another consumerist character. Mrs Sachdeva, Head of the English Deptt. at a local college, "liked to look plain and businesslike". She felt she "wasn't one of the idle housewives that this city was so full of. She was a literate woman" after all. Mrs Bhandari, wife of the DIG of Police, who took pride in calling herself a 'social activist', 'spoke perfect English, had an unerring taste in clothes and any party that she organized was bound to be success.' was another straw brilliantly sketched by Bajwa. And then rich Ravinder Kapoor's wife and daughter, who had at one go, bought pashmeena shawls worth 10 lakhs, had enough of money and poise to astonish any millionaire in the town. The personal likings and dislikings of women also rest on these social gimmicks. Mrs Kapoor dislikes Mrs Sachdeva the 'ordinary professor-type service class' women, coming to their mansioned house. Mrs Sandhu finds Mrs Bhandari 'snooty', may be because 'her English is so good', but her heaven of peace lies in the fact that 'Bhandari's are certainly not very rich and have only daughter still not married.' The social nature of women is exposed in the eyes of Ramchand at times narrator, sufferer and omniscient observer with critical eye of a psychologist who peeps into their minds, hypocrisies, values and life style for "he had watched innumerable women choose saris He had seen variety, he had seen envy he had seen despair. He knew well the bitterness of a plain woman wordless triumph of the beautiful ones". He finds in Mrs. Kapoor "a certain ruthlessness in the way she picked up a sari, ran a sharp eye a sharp eye over it and had glint in eyes before making up mind".. Among the various sari images created by the author, the imagery used in describing women of different classes picking up the right sari is amazing to see. And in all the cases, Ramchand is made to observe and feel the things, sometimes with Prufrockian uneasiness and sometimes with moralisings of Tiresias. Mrs Sachdeva the literate woman, Head of an English Department, likes dullish colours in choosing a sari, symbolic of her argument to stay apart from homogenisation with other females. The gorgeously decked up Rina Kapoor as bride dazzles Ramchand with her laughter and the way she sweeps the marble staircase regally with her bridal outfit leaves him spellbound.

The sari imagery reflects both beauty and ugliness of life real and reel. The 'rust red, blood red stains on Kamla's purple sari' and vomit stains on her blouse after her rape and violence become a profound motive for Ramchand to avenge her wrong. The sari image is convulsed, decontrolled and deconstructed with masterly superbness & intensity of pathos. After Kamla's death, the place inside the sari shop turned claustrophobic and grave, saris flew out at Ramchand whipping around 'engulfing him like a shroud' its black border suffocating him as if coercing him to take stock of situation and bear the burden of a saviour, a role which nature had imposed on him. Marxist/ socialist feminism rests on the creed of woman as tertiary consumer and primary producer in society, be it producing offspring in the womb or cooking and cleaning or reproducing and writing. The theorization and over theorisation has destabilized the whole system of study and epistemology, regarding women. The debate has rested more on patriarchy in every form and subordination of woman by it. Women's rights, demands and desires have reverberated all the corners by now. Rape, violence, prejudice and household inequities have become highly contested issues among women on behalf of women. The cumulative effect of publicising deficiency in social system for deprived women by affluent and economic advancement by few has generated a 'cultural lag' between the two, in which the basic values are eroded or changed for two groups and practically even in the name of feminism no cultural and intellectual intermixing is viable. I see this onslaught of global capitalist consumerist culture on Indian scene in light of Rupa Bajwa's Sari Shop, which is a fine mimicking of welfare feminism. The class solidarity among opulent group of Mrs. Sandhu, Mrs Sachdeva, Mrs. Kapoor and types is empowered by class consciousness which they feel and generate by ignominious and condescending values to 'have nots'. The Sari Shop explains the meaning of existence in spheres of capitalism, chaos and conflict, when women themselves have fell a prey to consumerism. In the words of Ram Chand, the shop assistant : "Life was grubby, clumsy, mean, flabby and meaningless.. Sick, sick, sick," (The Sari Shop, pp 111) enough to remind Burning Burning Burning Burning of Eliot's waste land. The Sari of Indian woman is exploited maximum as a potent metaphor, a vehicle for all kind of feminine expression. Sari is a symbol of womanhood and courtesy, but it also constraints their movements and gait, providing a negative implication of concept and The Sari Shop would be a fit and plausible metaphor of restricted and reserved life, compartmentalized thoughts, associated with various women groups, a fine camouflage behind which all the actual selves remain mystified. Hordes of women visited it daily, some as a part of routine activity which ended in cheap shopping bout at sari shop, some for weddings and parties, some need not visit, they could pedal saris some like Kapoors or some occasional visits by sombre lecturers like Mrs Sachdeva etc. The idiosyncrasies and oddities of women in choosing a sari or touching it brings out their common shared shopping idiocy. The pervading tone of buying, bargaining and spending sums a bizarre sentiment of meaninglessness in life, which Ramchand feels as "Money. Congestion and noise danced an eternal, crazy dance here together, leaving no moving space for other gentler things." (Sari Shop, pp, 5) The remarkable thing is why only Ramchand, the traditionally unfair male protagonist is forced into the

situation, to save, revolt and protest moved by helplessness and misery of the rape victim. For it is Ramchand who instead of getting numbed by social pressure and worldliness remarks, " What constant injustice! What a warped way of living! How wrong it all was! He felt reckless, strong enough to do anything, fight anyone for justice, for truth." (Sari Shop pp 222) The two women rich, intellectual and powerful Ramchand chooses to narrate Kamla's story for 'more importantly they were women' are enraged by 'the whole ugly, sordid, jigsaw story.' This breakdown of gynocentric world in which women can't live in perfect harmony and friendship with each other for their double standards or sub standards is alarming! Mrs. Sachedeva pushes away the Saris on her lap and speaks in clenched teeth, "I don't want to listen to all that rubbish again that too in Hindi. How dare you, tell me filthy stories about the kind of women you seem to know". Thus, women overdo and cut each other to size, especially the pearl faced, upper-upper intelligentsia who find bonding with women of their class only, and not with women of Ramchand's social class type. The gynocentric view is made complete by shooting arrows not only in the direction of men, but also women who are mimicked for their false Anglo-rational feminist, ideals adored and adopted so naturally only to turn deaf to the cries of a marginalized soul for help. A woman is oppressed by women for their tacit understanding of not understanding her plight. Kamla is belied, betrayed and berated by class of her own sex whereas a lone male cries for her existence, her voice, emotion and identity. Kamla the wronged, robbed, and raped women becomes a symbol and prototype of emancipation and individuality, though, she says and does things theatrically in a Schizophrenic manner, but it is the will of weaker woman, which overrules the high handedness of society ladies. The quagmire of assaults she bears throws a neon light on abyss of women's agony at the hands of women, envisioning true feminist to embark on a revolutionary struggle in terms of class conflict among women. Thus a better study lies in giving micro attention to axis of social constructs intertwined with gender and synthesising feminist dogmas with socio-cultural dimensions.

Rupa Bajwa has woven an intricate tale of the protagonist Ramchand trying to lift himself from the dregs of his lonely existence, by engaging with the people he meets on a more real level. Unfortunately he finds the phrase "two sides of the coin" to be true to almost all situations in life, where hope and desperation co-exist. Ramchand is 'everyman' –living in a small tenement in one of the bylanes of Amritsar. The contrasting strands of the life of the privileged and the plodding existence of the poor are like the weft and weave of the saris that are sold by Ramchand. Somehow threads interweave to create saris but a few crystals sewn in, or a shot of zari woven through can make a dramatic difference. It almost seems that Ramchand will lighten his dark lonely days with his efforts at self improvement. Ramchand for all his feeling of being unschooled, has studied that special language that women speak when they shop and is good at his job at the Sevak Sari House.

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has been struggle against androcentric ethics and female sensitivity in bonding, analysing and understanding each other universally. • Bajwa introduces a gallery of female characters, all distinct and apart in style, language, mannerism, ideology and in particular how they choose a sari, admire its texture, colour and fabric and fancy it wearing them. Mrs Sandhu wife of a chief engineer in Punjab State Electricity Board , epitomises 'power psychology' "as her rolls of fat jiggled as she waddled" into her spotless house, furnished with latest gadgetry and fashionable architectural feature. Her picture perfect frame is summed up as " A beautiful house, status family, a caring husband and good looks... what more could a woman ask for." • The sari imagery reflects both beauty and ugliness of life real and reel. The 'rust red, blood red stains on Kamla's purple sari' and vomit stains on her blouse after her rape and violence become a profound motive for Ramchand to avenge her wrong. The sari image is convulsed, decontrolled and deconstructed with masterly superbness & intensity of pathos. After Kamla's death, the place inside the sari shop turned claustrophobic and grave, saris flew out at Ramchand whipping around 'engulfing him like a shroud' its black border suffocating him as if coercing him to take stock of situation and bear the burden of a saviour, a role which nature had imposed on him. Marxist/ socialist feminism rests on the creed of woman as tertiary consumer and primary producer in society, be it producing offspring in the womb or cooking and cleaning or reproducing and writing. The theorization and over theorisation has destabilized the whole system of study and epistemology, regarding women.

5.5 PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDY

Ramchand is considered as protagonist. Introduction Rupa Bajwa is an Indian writer, born in Amritsar, Punjab, in 1976. She published in 2004 her first novel, The Sari Shop, which explores her hometown and the class dynamics of India. The novel has yielded the writer flattering reviews, with reviewers calling her India's new literary find. The novel won the Commonwealth award in 2005 and India's prestigious Sahitya Akademi Award for English 2006. "Bajwa dramatically illustrates the class gap in contemporary India in her debut novel, focusing on the fortunes of Ramchand, a lowly, disaffected clerk in a popular sari shop. The novel opens with Ramchand happily going about his duties serving the shop's mostly upper-class clients. Opportunity for advancement comes from an unlikely source when he attracts the attention of the beautiful, literate Rina Kapoor, whose family hires the shop to provide saris for her upcoming wedding. Inspired by his foray into a wider world ('there were cars and flowerpots and frosted glass trays with peacocks on them'), Ramchand embarks on a half-baked self-improvement effort that includes a reading program and some unintentionally comic attempts to learn English. Shortly afterwards, though, Ramchand sees the other side of Indian life when the wife of one of his co-workers, a woman named Kamla, descends into public drunkenness. Ramchand is a tenderly drawn character, reminiscent of Naipaul's innocent strivers, and the rest of the cast is vividly sketched. There are several typical first-novel flaws: the narrative is slow in the first half, and Bajwa's transitions between her character-driven sub plots are

occasionally uneven and erratic. But Bajwa's loving attention to detail - Ramchand washing his feet with lemon juice before he visits the Kapoors, the malicious chatter of the sari-shopping ladies - paints a compelling, acerbic picture of urban India. 13.1 Sari Shop—A Psychological Study The Sari Shop is a compact psychological study of a sari-walla in Amritsar. It focusses on the contrasts between his life and 1) what his father had hoped for him; 2) the customers of the sari shop; 3) his co-workers; 4) the suffering wife of this co-worker. These drive him to a breaking Unit 13: Rupa Bajwa: Sari Shop—Psychological Study Unlike many books about India, this one does not end in utter tragedy. The novel is entirely modern in its setting and focused in its concerns. No reference is made to Amritsar's tragic history under the British Raj, but perhaps the author assumes that the reader cannot be unaware of the broader context of the novel. If you are unaware, I highly recommend Paul Scott's Raj Quartet. Ramchand, a tired shop assistant in Sevak Sari House in Amritsar, spends his days patiently showing yards of fabric to the women of "status families" and to the giggling girls who dream of dressing up in silk but can only afford cotton. When Ramchand is sent to show his wares to a wealthy family preparing for their daughter's wedding, he is jolted out of the rhythm of his narrow daily life. His glimpse into a different world gives him an urgent sense of possibility. And so he attempts to recapture the hope that his childhood had promised, arming himself with two battered English grammar books, a fresh pair of socks, and a bar of Lifebuoy soap. But soon these efforts turn his life upside down, bringing him face to face with the cruelties on which his very existence depends. Reading group guide included. This was an interesting book, along similar lines to the books by Kaled Housseini, however set in India and not quite as well written. It revealed a lot about the Indian class system and society and was quite sad. The only thing I did not like about this book, is that the main character had the potential to really make something of himself or perhaps to even challenge the status quo, however after one bad exchange, he gave up and went back to his mundane life, with the suggestion that he had given up his quest for self-achievement for good, which was pretty disheartening and not how I thought the story would end. Overall though, a pretty good read. It was an interesting but ultimately depressing read. The main character, Ramchand, was very sympathetic. A sensitive young man who had lost his parents when he was 6 years old when there bus tipped over. He was taken in by a man who called himself uncle, who had a wife and several children of his own. But Ramchand was not treated like one of their own children. He grew up to be a solitary sort, having been sent to work in the sari shop when he was 15. His parents had instilled in him the importance of education and he had a yearning to improve himself. At the Sari Shop, he is exposed to women from wealthy families and is inspired to study english, spending his meager earnings on books. One day one of his colleagues does not come to work and Ramchand is sent to find out why. He goes to the address in a squalid part of the city and finds his colleagues wife in a drunken stupor. This wife was also an orphan but her experiences had scarred her badly and having discovered her husband's liquor, she had become an alcoholic. Ramchand was moved to try and help her and almost lost his job and his sanity in the process. This story exposes the corrupting influence of wealth and the corrosive effects of poverty that continue in

parts of India today .. Ramchand is born into a Hindu family of shop owners. His mother is an observant Hindu who takes him to temple weekly, but he is too young to absorb any special identity or spirituality that can be called Hindu. As an adult, Ramchand proves to be especially empathetic toward a Sikh couple who have lost two barely adult sons in an Indira Ghandi assault on the Golden Temple of Amritsar (Operation Blue Star, 1983), trying to give solace to them in their own home. The Sari Shop is about many things, but for the main character, Ramchand, it is about the development of character itself, particularly about putting one's morals into practice under morally impossible circumstances. Ramchand's parents enrolled him into English medium school at age 6, but that same year, both parents were killed in a catastrophic bus accident. Ramchand was sent to a distant uncle in Amritsar for his education, but his uncle selected a more economical curriculum. Ramchand spent summers with his grandmother. At age 15, Ramchand was withdrawn from school and received a school leaving certificate. Ramchand did not leave school with the knowledge of English he had hoped to achieve. He observed later that no one had ever asked to see his certificate showing he completed eighth grade. His work would not require much reading, writing and figuring. The astonishing thing is that Ramchand's family expected him to support himself fully and to live independently from age 15 on—and he did without any further contact from his family apparently. The action of The Sari Shop opens when Ramchand is 26 and he has been living and working in the same place since he was 15. Through his work at the Sari Shop, Ramchand becomes acquainted with the absolute wealthiest famlies in town and even arranges a quick and dirty invitation to the wedding of one of Amritsar's wealthiest daughters. There is a lot of description of the different kinds of saris available at the shop. They are divided by fabric, by design—by type of border, by type of skirt; there are saris and salwar kameezs, and each garmet can have a head piece called by various names such as pallu or chunni. The colors are vividly described e.g. "bottle green." Ramchand learns from his friends at the Sari House, particularly Chander, that one of the wealthiest families in Amritsar withheld temporarily, then permanenetly, three months of regular wages from a significant number of workers. Ramchand tries talking calmly to the factory owner and is firmly told that the profit margins don't allow the wages to be paid. Ramchand also learns that Chander's wife is the victim of "persuasion" outside the law for demanding her husband's wages. She is drunk, arrested, raped, then sexually assaulted by the police using a lathi or night stick. In a different incident, Chander's wife Kamla threw a sharp object at another of the rich family heads, Ravinder Kapoor. This time the reaction was catastrophic. Kapoor —no doubt off the record—hired goons to break all of Kamla's bones, parade her naked through the slum neighborhood, and burn down her slum house with Kamla inside. This systematic destruction of Kamla's life creates a moral crisis for Ramchand. The families responsible are the same ones who buy the most expensive saris. The other shop boys do not see the overall implications. Ramchand stays home two weeks without authorization trying to figure out what to do. The book has a lot of comical elements that ride on the gossip of the ladies from the different families as they browse the saris. There is real color in the book as the descriptions of the fabrics jump off the page. For me one of

the most charming threads in the story is Ramchand's desire to learn English. Bajwa really makes it clear how lack of context makes it so hard to span the words, when one word can have so many meanings. Ramchand needs the "tuition" that the rich boys are getting. He also deserves it. Yet Ramchand is making real progress. I rarely give just two stars. The setting and details of life in India is very descriptive and visual. I enjoyed that. The story itself pulled me along but I was disappointed in the end. Some of the events seemed inevitable. The book jacket calls it a "satire." I just don't "get" it as such. Perhaps I'd have to have grown up in India. Here is my biggest problem with the book (besides plot), there are endless references to specific things in India that are not commonly known by an American. These words are not italicized, nor is there a glossary. One could assume some general meanings. I found this disconcerting to the flow of the book. It is written in English, I presume, as there is no translator. However, when I want to read with a red pen in my hand, it is not a good sign. This could have been much tighter. If you love India, well, I still can't recommend it. There are so many beautifully written books about it. I'd say, pass. As I will pass along this copy to a friend who is so called to return to India, that I suspect she will overlook all of the picky details I have mentioned. Rupa Bajwa makes her debut with a haunting story set in Amritsar. It is a quintessential Indian story, but one that diverges from the usual existential woe stories of the Indian middle class. This one goes a bit lower, in terms of the protagonist - a sari shop assistant, and through his eyes paints a miniature picture of 'the other india'. In spite of a troubled childhood, he lives an uncomplicated home-shop-home life, until one trip outside this routine, changes his outlook. Thus begins a journey - a search for a meaningful existence, which brings with it an empathy for others. Juxtaposed with him, is another character, who hasn't had a great childhood herself, and manages to fall deeper into the morass of her life, when she tries to rebel against the unfairness of it all. Their meeting brings about the next turning point in the story. Throughout the story there are several instances that show the superficiality of the people around him, especially the upper classes, and their innate selfishness. The climax has been treated extremely well - closing the door to the larger world. Tragic, but realistic. And it is perhaps that streak of realism that runs through the book, that forces the reader to feel for the characters, and their pain. Meanwhile, I think the author has managed to be a part of the novel too, literally, through the character of Rina Kapoor. A very good read, especially if you're into Indian fiction. This is a poignant story of real life India and real life Indian people. It was completely believable. The protagonist, an earnest & simple sari-walla named Ramachand, works hard everyday, studies English on his own, lives a clean and modest life dictated by his beliefs in right and wrong, accepting the simple truths of his life and history.... the circumstances of his birth and sudden orphan status, the fact that his schooling abruptly ended with his parents' death, the loss of his inheritance through unscrupulous relatives, the limitations which became his reality by virtue of circumstances. Then his whole belief system is upended by an encounter with a colleague's wife and the reality of her brutal and bitter existence. I felt the story was incredibly realistic, a story about the real India, not the India we see through the eyes of Indian immigrants to the West, or those

educated in the West or with western values. No, this was an India I have not read about before. It was very eye-opening and tender and sad. When it comes to contemporary fiction, I seek out the uncelebrated little novels more often than the awards shortlisters. This is one such book. It's the story of Ramchand, who is bestowed with a thrilling opportunity to experience the world outside his employer's sari shop. Rupa Bajwa has yet to publish a second novel, but I'll be ready to read it when she does Ms. Bajwa's debut novel is a poignant tale to say the least. She has a compelling ability to write about and portray daily life in her hometown of Amritsar, India. She caputures the culture and transfers it into words that make you feel YOU are THERE, in Amritsar. I could hear the sounds, see the sights, smell the smells and listen to the people. I will be looking forward to future novels by this author. From back cover: "When Ramchand is sent to a new part of the city to show wares to a wealthy family preparing for their daughter's wedding, he is jolted out of the rhythm of his narrow daily life. His glimpse into a different world gives him an urgent sense of possibility. He begins to see himself, his life, and his future more clearly. And so he attempts to recapture the hope that his childhood had promised, arming himself with two battered English grammar books, a fresh pair of socks, and a bar of Lifebuoy soap. But soon these efforts turn his life upside down, bringing him face to face with the cruelties on which his very existence depends." Ramchand is a quiet, slightly withdrawn clerk at the Sevak Sari House, the most elite sari shop in the small city of Amritsar. Slowly sinking into apathy because of the drudgery of his day to day existence, Ramchand is startled back into life when he is chosen to deliver saris to the soon-to-be-married daughter of the most powerful family in town. Drawn to the elegance of Rina Kapoor's life, he vows to better himself to improve his lot in life. Using his valuable savings to purchase used books, Ramchand teaches himself to read English. In the midst of his self-improvement project, Ramchand is sent on another errand, a journey which takes him to the depths of Amritsar society. Dispatched to find an absent coworker, Ramchand learns more than he ever wanted about the tragedy of his colleague's home life. The more he learns about the crazy drunken wife of his coworker, the more disaffected Ramchand becomes with his life and the inequalities of Indian society. This book is a well-drawn picture of the extremes of Indian society. A quick read, The Sari Shop nevertheless provokes deeper reflection on the ties that bind us all to the life we know. In an interview at the end of the Nothe author talks about writing it to express her frustration with Indian society and the vast inequalities facing women and the poor. I enjoy fiction about India, and believe this is one of the better treatments I've read on the subject. This debut novel certainly points to better things to come from Rupa Bajwa.

Ramchand, a shop assistant in Sevak Sari House in Amritsar, spends his days patiently showing yards of fabric to the women of "status families" and to the giggling girls who dream of dressing up in silk but can only afford cotton. When Ramchand is sent to a new part of the city to show wares to a wealthy family preparing for their daughter's wedding, he is jolted out of the rhythm of his narrow daily life. His glimpse into a different world gives him an urgent sense of possibility. He begins to see himself, his life, and his

future more clearly. And so he attempts to recapture the hope that his childhood had promised, arming himself with two battered English grammar books, a fresh pair of socks, and a bar of Lifebuoy soap. But soon these efforts turn his life upside down, bringing him face to face with the cruelties on which his very existence depends. • The Sari Shop is a compact psychological study of a sari-walla in Amritsar. It focusses on the contrasts between his life and 1) what his father had hoped for him; 2) the customers of the sari shop; 3) his co-workers; 4) the suffering wife of this co-worker. These drive him to a breaking point. Unlike many books about India, this one does not end in utter tragedy. The novel is entirely modern in its setting and focused in its concerns. No reference is made to Amritsar's tragic history under the British Raj, but perhaps the author assumes that the reader cannot be unaware of the broader context of the novel. If you are unaware, I highly recommend Paul Scott's Raj Quartet. • At the Sari Shop, he is exposed to women from wealthy families and is inspired to study english, spending his meager earnings on books. One day one of his colleagues does not come to work and Ramchand is sent to find out why. He goes to the address in a squalid part of the city and finds his colleagues wife in a drunken stupor. This wife was also an orphan but her experiences had scarred her badly and having discovered her husband's liquor, she had become an alcoholic. Ramchand was moved to try and help her and almost lost his job and his sanity in the process. This story exposes the corrupting influence of wealth and the corrosive effects of poverty that continue in parts of India today. • The Sari Shop is about many things, but for the main character, Ramchand, it is about the development of character itself, particularly about putting one's morals into practice under morally impossible circumstances. Ramchand is born into a Hindu family of shop owners. His mother is an observant Hindu who takes him to temple weekly, but he is too young to Unit 13: Rupa Bajwa: Sari Shop—Psychological Study Notes LOVELY PROFESSIONAL UNIVERSITY 109 absorb any special identity or spirituality that can be called Hindu. As an adult, Ramchand proves to be especially empathetic toward a Sikh couple who have lost two barely adult sons in an Indira Ghandi assault on the Golden Temple of Amritsar (Operation Blue Star, 1983), trying to give solace to them in their own home. • Rupa Bajwa makes her debut with a haunting story set in Amritsar. It is a quintessential Indian story, but one that diverges from the usual existential woe stories of the Indian middle class. This one goes a bit lower, in terms of the protagonist - a sari shop assistant, and through his eyes paints a miniature picture of 'the other india'. In spite of a troubled childhood, he lives an uncomplicated home-shop-home life, until one trip outside this routine, changes his outlook. Thus begins a journey - a search for a meaningful existence, which brings with it an empathy for others. Juxtaposed with him, is another character, who hasn't had a great childhood herself, and manages to fall deeper into the morass of her life, when she tries to rebel against the unfairness of it all. Their meeting brings about the next turning point in the story.

5.4 QUESTIONS

- Discuss the psychological and marginalized aspects presented by Rupa Bajwa in her novel, *The Sari Shop.*
- Explicate the statement, "The Sari Shop: A Microcosm of Society."
- Discuss the feminist aspect given in Rupa Bajwa's, *The Sari Shop*.

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6

CRITICAL STUDY OF *GOD OF SMALL THINGS* - PART I

Unit Structure:

6.0 Objective

6.1 Introduction- Arundathi Roy

6.2 Character sketches

6.3 Themes

6.4 Conclusion

6.5 Important Questions

6.0 OBJECTIVE

To introduce students to Arundathi Roy and the characters and themes of her Booker Prize winning novel *The God of Small Things*.

6.1 INTRODUCTION

ARUNDATHI ROY

Suzanna Arundathi Roy, famously known as Arundathi Roy was born in 1961 in Shillong. She is an Indian author, actress and political activist who is popular for her involvement in environmental and human rights issues and her award winning novel *God of Small Things*.

Roy's mother was a Christian of Syrian descent who challenged India's inheritance law (suing for Christian women receiving an equal share in their father's property) and her father was a Bengali tea planter. After her parents' divorce, she moved to Kerala along with her mother and brother. She studies architecture at Delhi School of Architecture. Later, she wrote and co-starred in a film *In Which Annie Gives It to Those Ones* and wrote scripts for *Electric Moon*. A case was filed against her in 1995 as she wrote two articles claiming that Shekhar Kapur's film *Bandit Queen* exploited Phoolan Devi.

Roy's debut novel *The God of Small Things* received the 1998 Man Booker Prize for Fiction. The novel is considered to be semiautobiographical and departed from conventional plots. For twenty years she wrote only nonfiction addressing the problems faced by her homeland. *Power Politics* (2001), *The Algebra of Infinite Justice* (2002), *War Talk* (2003), *Public Power in the Age of Empire* (2004), *Field Notes on Democracy: Listening to Grasshoppers* (2009), *Broken Republic: Three Essays* (2011), and *Capitalism: A Ghost Story* (2014) were some of her nonfiction pieces. In 2017 she published her second novel *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* whose characters included a transgender woman and a

resistance fighter in Kashmir. She is married to the filmmaker Pradip Krishen.

6.2 CHARACTER SKETCHES

RAHEL IPE

She is one amongst the fraternal twins, the other being her brother, Estha. She is eighteen minutes younger to Estha.They do not consider each other as separate entities and consider themselves together as "me" and separately as "we" or "us". They have a telepathic communication and can communicate to each other without words and also share each other's dreams. Although she hasn't seen what was done to Estha by the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man it is mentioned that she remembers it.Rahel believes that she is psychologically and emotionally incomplete without her brother, Estha. She is very sensitive towards the response of her mother towards her and gets easily hurt by any harsh words or action by her mother. As a child she has been quite self-assertive and flamboyant. We can often see her wearing gaudy hair styles and red tinted glasses and spontaneously dances to radio. She can be seen noticing the small things around her. . Her mother dies when she was eleven years old and after that she drifts from one school to another .She is blacklisted at Nazareth Covent for decorating a knob of fresh cow dung with small flowers. She was expelled from the school for hiding behind doors and deliberately colliding with her seniors to find out if breasts hurt. The second time she was expelled for smoking and the third time for setting fire to her Housemistress's fake hair. When she is separated from her brother and mother, she becomes rebellious, and indifferent to all relationships around her. Later, she moves to Delhi to study architecture but does not earn a degree even after eight years. She marries Larry McCaslin and moves to Boston. Their relationship however remains unsuccessful. She then divorces him and moves to Washington. She returns to Ayemenem in 1993 when she comes to know that Estha has been returned to Ayemenem.

ESTHA

Estha is short for Esthappen Yako. He was born 18 minutes before Rahel. He is represented as a sensitive and quiet child who is practical and responsible. As a seven year old, he loves Elvis Presley and imitates his style. He also loves *The Sound of Music* and has to go out of the theatre as he starts singing loudly during the movie. He gets molested by the Orangedrink Lemondrink man at the theatre and this incident changes the whole course of the novel. After this traumatising experience of his, we constantly see him being worried that the Orangedrink Lemondrink man would come again and he keeps thinking of ways to escape him. He constantly keeps thinking that anything could happen to anyone and its best to be prepared. It is because of this fear that Estha plans to row across Meenchal river and live in History House. He gets the boat repaired by Velutha but his plan goes awry. Rahel and Sophie Mol also join him in his plan and the boat capsizes and Sophie Mol dies. Baby Kochamma tricks Estha and Rahel into believing that if they do not testify against Velutha

that they were kidnapped by him, their mother would go to jail. Estha and Rahel are forced to see Velutha being beaten to a pulp and Estha testifies against Velutha. This again acts as a turning point in his life. He is forced to live with his father (in Calcutta) later on and from then on we see Estha going completely silent. He does his schooling from a boy's school and refuses to go to college. Instead, he can be seen silently doing all household chores. He turns into a brooding introspective man. Once he could be seen nursing his beloved, bald, incontinent seventeen year old mongrel (Khubchand)which was about to die. After the dog dies, he starts taking long walks. On his return to Ayemenem, he reconnects with Rahel.

AMMU

Ammu is the mother of Estha and Rahel. Ammu is discriminated by her family throughout the novel. As a teenager Chacko is sent abroad to study whereas she does not get the same treatment. She feels trapped in the family. One summer she gets permission from her family to go to Calcutta. She meets Baba there and immediately marries him. Baba is discovered to be an alcoholic and when she can no more tolerate his abuse, she leaves him along with her twins. Upon her return to Ayemenem, she is not so welcome by the family. Baby Kochamma constantly taunts Ammu. During her stay at Ayemenem, she falls in love with Velutha. Although both know that their love cannot be known by the public, both of them meet each other every night. After her family comes to know of her affair with Velutha, Baby Kochamma files a fake complaint against him and gets him arrested. Heart broken and separated from her twins, she dies at the age of thirty one (in a lodge) with no one by her side. Chacko has her cremated as the church wouldn't let bury her.

VELUTHA

He is a Paravan (untouchable) and is known to be very skilled with his hands. He is an excellent carpenter and fixed all the machines in the pickle factory of Ipe's family. Although he is quite dark, his name in Malayalam means "white". He is an active member of Communist Party. He returns to Ayemenem to help his father, Vellya Paapen, to take care of his paralyzed brother. Velutha becomes quite close to the twins Estha and Rahel and it is ultimately his affair with Ammu which leads to his death. He is wrongly implicated by Baby Kochamma in a case of kidnapping and attempted rape. As a result of which the police arrest and beat him up cruelly. He dies in the lock up.

CHACKO

He is the older brother of Ammu. He is constantly represented as an object of affection of Mammachi(his mother).He went to Oxford as a Rhodes Scholar for his higher studies. He meets Margaret in an Oxford café, falls in love with her and marries her without his family's knowledge. However, within a year they get divorced around the time their daughter is born. He returns to Ayemenem and runs their pickle factory. He is a self-proclaimed Marxist and tries to be a benevolent employer. He often insists that he is the sole owner of the factory. Upon Sophie Mol's arrival at Ayemenem he can

be seen as a doting father. The death of Sophie Mol devastates him and he emigrates to Canada.

BABA

Baba is the father of Estha and Rahel.. He worked in a tea plantation. He was an alcoholic who often beat Ammu. Once he even tries to prostitute Ammu to his English employer. As a result, Ammu leaves him when the children were quite young. Later it is known that he has resigned from the plantation, remarried and and more or less stopped drinking. After Sophie Mol's death, Estha moves in to live with him. As an adult, Estha is sent back to Ayemenem as Baba plans to emigrate to Autralia.

BABY KOCHAMMA

Navomi Ipe is known as Baby Kochamma throughout the novel. She is Mammachi's sister. She is represented as an insecure, judgemental, selfish and vindictive person. When she was young, she fell in love with an Irish monk named Father Mulligan. In the hopes of being with him, she entered a convent in Madras. She finds her life in convent miserable and is not able to be close to Father Mulligan. She writes cryptic letters to her family hinting at her miserable life in the convent and is ultimately taken out of the convent. She goes to United States to learn ornamental gardening. Upon her return to India, she can be seen as obese and devoted to gardening. She can be often seen taunting Ammu and her twins. It is she who files a fake complaint against Velutha and manipulates Estha into testifying against Velutha. She also manipulates Chacko into sending Ammu and Estha away from their home. As an old woman she becomes bitter and addicted to television and remains constrained to her home.

PAPPACHI

Pappachi is the grandfather of Estha and Rahel. He is known in the public circle as Benaan John Ipe and was an Entomologist under British rule. He had discovered a moth but it could not be named after him as the government scientists failed to recognise it as a new species at that time. He was seventeen years older to Mammachi and often used to beat her until Chacko stopped him once.

MAMMACHI

She is the wife of Pappachi and mother of Chacko and Ammu. She is a violinist and a pickle maker who believes in divisions of caste, class and wealth. She silently endures the physical abuse done by her husband. After Chacko stops Pappachi from beating her up, Chacko becomes an object of her love.

SOPHIE MOL

She is the daughter of Chacko and Margaret. Her visit to Ayemenem and her subsequent death is what forms the main structure of the whole story. She is loved by everyone in Chacko's family.

MARGARET

She was Chacko's wife and mother of Sophie mol. She divorces Chacko and later marries Joe.

JOE

Second husband of Margaret Kochamma who dies in a car accident.

KOCHU MARIA

The cook of Ipe family. She is addicted to T.V. She is represented to be extremely short and bad-tempered.

COMRADE K.N.M.PILLAI

Leader of Communist Party in Ayemenem and he happens to be quite ambitious. He tries to convince Chacko's labourer's to revolt.

INSPECTOR THOMAS MATHEW

A police inspector whose officers beat up Velutha. When he comes to know that Baby Kochamma had filed a false complaint, he tells her that if the twins do not testify against Velutha he would charge Baby Kochamma with the crime.

LARRY MCcCASLIN

Rahel's ex-husband. He used to live in Boston.

REVEREND E JOHN IPE

He is the father of Pappachi and Baby Kochamma. He is also known as Punnyan Kunju. He was famous for having been blessed by the Patriarch of Antioch.

MURALIDHARAN

An insane man who sits on a milestone, counting his keys.

COMRADE E.M.S..NAMBOODIRIPAD

The leader of Communist party in Kerala.

KUTTAPEN

Velutha's paralysed brother.

THE ORANGE DRINK LEMON DRINK MAN

He works in a theatre and had molests Estha

FATHER MULLIGAN

An Irish missionary that Baby Kochamma loves unrequitedly.

KARI SAIPU

An Englishman who "went native" and lived in the "History House."

6.3 THEMES

PATRIARCHY

Arundathi Roy seeks to draw our attention to the patriarchy prevalent in the Indian society through the female characters of the novel. Mammachi marries a man who was seventeen years older to her which shows her unquestioning obedience to the authority. She was a promising violinist but had to leave her career because Pappachi asked her to do so. Domestic violence was a part of her life which she silently endured. He beat her every night with a brass flower vase. After Pappachi's death, Chacko dominated her life as he takes over the pickle factory which Mammachi had started. Baby Kochamma is another character in this novel but she does not live a submissive woman instead, she becomes the very embodiment of patriarchy. Throughout the novel we can see the vindictive attitude she had towards Ammu and her children.

Ammu is one of the important characters of the novel who becomes a victim of patriarchy. Her father denies her the opportunity to study further as he considered education of girls to be an unnecessary expense and sends his son to study abroad. She becomes frustrated by her situation at home and marries a man(Baba) whom she meets when she goes for a vacation. Her husband turns out to be a drunkard and tries to prostitute her to his boss (Mr. Hollick). She walks out of her marriage and goes back to her home in Kerala along with her children. Being a divorcee, she is unwelcome and ostracised by the society. Her repressed existence in the family leads her to have an affair with Velutha (an Untouchable). Her mother condemns this affair of Ammu although she turns a blind eye to Ammu's brother's illicit relationship with factory workers calling it 'a man's needs'. Her affair with Velutha leads to his death and her being separated from her twins. When Ammu goes to meet Inspector Thomas Matthew to save Velutha, he harasses her. Ultimately when she dies, the church refuses to bury her.

CASTE DISCRIMINATION AND POLITICS

Although Untouchability has been banned in India, Velutha falls a victim to the discriminatory caste system which leads to his death. He belonged to the Paravan caste.As per Mammachi's account of the life of Paravans, there was a time when Untouchables were not allowed to use public roads, not allowed to cover their upper bodies or use umbrellas and had to cover their mouths while speaking so as to not pollute the upper caste people.

Velutha was an accomplished carpenter, mechanic and craftsman. He also repaired clocks, radios and water pumps. He looked after all the plumbing work and works related to electrical gadgets at Ammu's house. Mammachi believed that due to his skill if he hadn't been a Paravan, he would have become an engineer. His affair with Ammu leads to his downfall. When the family members of Ammu come to know of their affair and Sophie Mol's

death, Baby Kochamma files a false case against Velutha stating that he tried to rape Ammu and kidnapped the twins. Without properly making an investigation, the policemen brutally beat up Velutha. Upon knowing that they have made a mistake, Inspector Thomas Matthew makes sure that Comrade Pillai would not make any issue out of this incident as Velutha was a party member. Later he indirectly coaxes Baby Kochamma to make the twins give a false testimony against Velutha as he would have to arrest Baby Kochamma if that is not done because the police had beaten up Velutha believing Baby Kochamma's words to be true. Baby Kochamma tricks the twins into giving a false testimony and Velutha dies in prison. The deep rootedness of caste system can be understood from the fact that it was Velya Paapen(father of Velutha) who informs Ammu's family regarding his son's affair and curses him for doing son. A father turns against his own son as he believed that his son should never have loved Ammu due to their caste.

Communist party is believed to be a champion of the downtrodden mass. Comrade Pillai is depicted an a representative of the party. Eventhough he talks about the emancipation of the mass, he is seen talking to Chacko asking him to send away Velutha from the factory as other Party workers are not happy with him due to his caste. Comrade Pillai also had a role in Velutha's death as he did not do anything to help him. On the day of Ammu's family's confrontation with Velutha abou his affair with Velutha, he goes to meet Comrade Pillai but he says that he would not interfere in that matter. Later when Inspector Thomas Matthew calls Comrade Pillai to enquire if he would interfere in the arrest of Velutha, he answers in negative. In the end, Comrade Pillai makes use of the death of Velutha to shut down the factory.

FORBIDDEN LOVE

The theme of forbidden love is one of the central themes of this novel. The narrator mentions that it's the 'love laws' which decide who can love whom in Indian society. People breaking those laws are punished by the society. The main victims of transgressing this law are Velutha and Ammu. Velutha, an Untouchable loves the upper caste Ammu. This leads him to be fabricated in a case with no one standing by his side including the Police and the politicians. Ultimately, he dies in the prison due to Police brutality. By loving Velutha, Ammu had to be separated from her children and ultimately when she dies the age of thirty one, the church does not allow her to be buried. Her body had to be cremated with only Chacko and Rahel as witness to it. In the case of Estha and Rahel, their childhood traumas lead them to form as incestuous relationship with each other as adults.

MEMORY

The whole novel keeps shifting from 1993 to 1969 and back to 1993.The story is told in a non-linear way. The first chapter introduces the readers to all the important events of the novel. It is only through a series of non-linear flashbacks that the reader understands how the events in 1969 culminated in the present situation of all the characters. The flashbacks are told by a

narrator through the lenses of a child. The flashbacks have childlike words and also the reality as understood by the children. Thus most of the novel relies on memory.

LALTAINS AND MOMBATTIS

The big men like Mammachi, Baby Kochamma, Chacko, Comrade Pillai and Inspector can be called the Laltains who had the power to influence the course of the story. The small men like Ammu, Velutha, Estha and Rahel fall prey to the scheming and plotting of the big men. They have very less power to determine even their fate. All the small men end up suffering during the course of the novel.

6.4 CONCLUSION

Even though *The God of Small Things* is the first novel of Arundathi Roy, she has brilliantly characterised intricate characters with many shades to them. The representation of the central characters Rahel and Estha is also admirable as even the narrative shifts to a childlike narration when there is a shift to their childhood.

Arundathi Roy has brilliantly touched upon various important issues in this novel. The novel focuses on love laws and the consequences of not following it. Socially relevant issues of patriarchy, caste discrimination, politics and trauma are also intervened in the novel very intricately.

6.5 IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. Explain the issue of Patriarchy as depicted in the novel.
2. Draw a character sketch of Rahel.
3. Discuss the important themes of the novel.
4. Make a comment on the politics as represented in the novel.

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7

CRITICAL STUDY OF *GOD OF SMALL THINGS* - PART II

Unit Structure:

7.0 Objective

7.1 Introduction

7.2 Summary

7.3 Conclusion

7.4 Important Questions

7.0 OBJECTIVE

To give a chapter wise summary of the entire novel *The God of Small Things.*

7.1 INTRODUCTION

The novel *The God of Small Things* received the 1998 Man Booker Prize for Fiction. It is considered to be semi-autobiographical in nature. Set in Ayemenem, a small town in Kerala, the novel narrates the story of Rahel and her twin brother Estha. The novel brilliantly portrays the story of forbidden love and piercing political drama. The narration keeps shifting from 1993 to 1969 and back to 1993.

7.2 SUMMARY

The story is narrated in fragments and it keeps shifting from present (1993, when Estha and Rahel are thirty one years old) to past (1969, when Estha and Rahel are seven years old) and vice-versa.

CHAPTER 1- PARADISE, PICKLES AND PRESERVES

The narrator describes the months May and June in Ayemenem (a small town in Kerala) using various images. The story begins in 1993 when Rahel Ipe returns to Ayemenem to meet her dizygotic twin, Estha. In their house in Ayemenem, Baby Kochamma is the only relative of hers who lives there along with her cook, Kochu Maria.

As children both of them didn't look alike, but they thought of themselves together as "Me". They were physically separate but had joint identities. Their bond was so strong that they could share each other's dreams and memories as children. Rahel remembers some of the incidents that Estha had gone there although she was not physically present there. Now both of

them have grown up (thirty one years old) and think of themselves as "Them".

The narrator next describes the story of the birth of Rahel and Estha. While Ammu (Rahel and Estha's mother) was being taken to the hospital for delivery by Baba(Rahel and Estha's father) , their car broke down on the winding tea estates of Assam. Later, they had to take a bus to hospital. Estha and Rahel wished that they had been born in the bus as Estha believed that then they would have got free bus rides for lifetime.

The story shifts to 1969 to the funeral of Sophie Mol(daughter of Chacko,their uncle, and Margaret). Sophie Mol had come from England along with her mother to visit Chacko when she drowned and died. During the funeral, Ammu, Estha and Rahel are made to stand separately from all the family members of the Ipe family. Rahel's child like observation and imagination makes her imagine that Sophie Mol is still alive in her coffin. She observes the newly painted dome of the church and she imagined the man who painted the dome to fall and die while painting it. She also observes that a bat baby has climbed up Baby Kochamma's(Rahel's mother's aunt) sari. Rahel believed that Sophie Mol died because she was buried alive during her funeral.

After the funeral Ammu took the twins to the Police station to see Velutha and make a statement regarding Velutha's arrest. Thomas Matthew, the police inspector, calls Ammu a prostitute and asks her to go home quietly. She leaves the Police Sation crying and returns to her home.

Two weeks after this incident Estha was returned to his father in Calcutta (Ammu and Baba were divorced). Soon he grows quieter and stops talking altogether. He finished school with mediocre results and refused to go to college. He usually does the household chores and goes on long walks around the neighbourhood. After twenty three years Estha has been re returned to Ayemenem since Baba is going to migrate to Australia and he cannot take Estha along with him. After returning to Ayemenem he takes long walks over there and the arrival of Rahel breaks the quietness of his mind.

After the death of Ammu, which happened few years after Sophie Mol's death, Rahel drifted from school to school. She was blacklisted in a school for decorating a knob of fresh cowdung with flowers. Later she was expelled for hiding behind doors and deliberately colliding with her seniors to know if breasts hurt. Second time she was expelled from a school for smoking, and the third time for setting fire to her Housemistresss's false hair bun.

Eventually, she joined a mediocre college of Architecture in Delhi. She spent eight years there without taking a degree. There she met an American student, Larry McCaslin, married him and moved to Boston. After some time they got divorced and Rahel came back to Ayemenem when she heard that Estha has been re returned.

Rahel hadn't visited Ayemenem either when Mammachi (Rahel's grandmother) died or when Chacko migrated to Canada. Only Baby

Kochamma(Navomi Ipe) lives in Rahel's ancesteral home at Ayemenem. She is eighty three years old now and has started wearing Mammachi's jewellery and wearing lots of makeup. She does not like the twins and wants them to leave as soon as possible.

Baby Kochamma fell in love with an Irish monk named father Mulligan when she was eighteen years old. She would often find excuses to be near him and try to impress him through her charitable actions but nothing came out of it. Later Father Mulligan left for Madras and Baby Kochamma followed him and joined a convent. Her life in convent was miserable as she hardly got any chance to meet father Mulligan. So she wrote a letter to her father to come and fetch her. She was then sent abroad to study ornamental gardening. After her return, she spent her time gardening.

In the present day Ayemenem, Baby Kochamma keeps herself busy by watching television along with her cook, Kochu Maria. She has grown to neglect her garden and keeps her doors, windows and even refrigerators locked. Baby Kochamma questions Rahel but she doesn't reply and keeps looking at the old pickle factory, Paradise, Pickles and Preserves. Mammachi (Rahel's grandmother) used to run it and make variety of preserved products.

The story shifts to 1969 when after Sophie Mol's death, Ammu consults a twin expert and decides to send Estha away to Calcutta to live with his father. The narrator muses that "things can change in a day" and that seemingly ordinary things can add up to life-changing events. The story of the novel begins with Sophie Mol's arrival to India but the narrator feels that it could also have begun centuries ago when the Hindu caste system was laid down including the "Love Laws".

CHAPTER 2- PAPPACHI'S MOTH

The narrative begins in 1969 when Estha, Rahel, Ammu, Chacko and Baby Kochamma are driving in their blue Plymouth to Cochin to pick up Sophie Mol and her mother, Margaret, from the airport. On their way they had plans to see *The Sound of Music* and stay at Hotel Sea Queen. Sophie Mol and her mother were visiting Ayemenem as Margaret had married Joe after divorcing Chacko but now since Joe has died in an accident, Chacko had invited them over to Kerala.

The narrator describes the travellers in the car. Ammu currently does not have any surname. Estha has an 'Elvis puff' and Rahel has her hair tied up in a band called a "Love-in- Tokyo". Chacko keep quoting *The Great Gatsby* as they drive.

The narration shifts to the story of Ammu. She is now twenty seven years old. She had moved to Ayemenem when she was eighteen and since there was no dowry, no one asked to marry her. She goes to Calcutta and meets Baba at a wedding reception. She marries him and moves to Assam and remains happy for sometime until she finds out that he was a liar and an alchoholic. After their children's birth, Baba tries to prostitute Ammu to his boss(Mr. Hollick) to keep his job. When she refused, she was beaten up and

Ammu left her husband and moved to Ayemenem to protect her children from him. Although she was taken back in her family at Ayemenem, she was always disgraced in the town for being a divorcee. Ammu seemed dangerous and wild on certain days and on other days she was a caring mother to her twins. She seems to have an "Unsafe Edge" about her which lead her to "love by night the man her children loved by day."

The story shifts back to the car ride in Plymouth in 1969. Baby Kochamma doesn't like the twins as they are half Hindu and children of a divorced woman. She keeps trying to make them unhappy about their unhappy fate. The roof of the car contains a sign advertising Paradise, Pickles and Preserves. The pickle company began as a small personal business of Mammachi but later it flourished and drew the jealousy of Pappachi. He would beat Mammachi every night using a brass flower vase until Chacko stopped him once. After this incident Pappachi never beat to Mammachi nor did he ever speak to her in his entire lifetime.

It was later on that he bought the blue Plymouth from Munnar. Pappachi had worked an an Imperial Entomologist and discovered a moth believed to have been of a new species. He wasn't believed until after his retirement and the moth was named after someone else. Pappachi considered this to be his greatest failure and had fits of rage because of this. Chacko describes Pappachi as an Anglophile and describes history as an old house. The twins think that he is talking about the "History House" which was owned by Kari Saipu, an Englishman who went native. The twins grow familiar with History House later as a place where history was acted out as violence.

Chacko had a habit of assembling model aeroplanes and then crashing them immediately. After Pappachi died, he quit his teaching job in a college and took over the Pickle factory and hired a lot of workers. But the business started to decline.

In the car the twins are worried about being late foe the movie. They get stopped at a crossing by an approaching train. Estha watches Murlidharan, an insane man who sits at the milestone at the crossing and keeps counting his keys. Then they see a huge march of Marxists carrying the red flags. The marchers were demanding one hour lunch break and that Untouchable workers should not be addressed by their caste names. Amongst the protesters Rahel sees Velutha (a man she knows) and yells for him but he disappears in the march.

The narrator goes on to describe Velutha. He is an Untouchable, a Paravan. He has a leaf-shaped birthmark on his back. As a child he used to work for Pappachi along with his father, Velya Paapen and was not allowed to enter the Ipe house or touch anything. Velutha was a skilled carpenter and had built the dining table, sliding door in Ipe household and set up machines in the Pickle factory. Velutha soon disappeared for four years and returned when his brother Kuttapen meets with an accident and becomes paralyzed. Velutha is hired by Chacko to work in the Pickle factory. Velutha and twins become very close and he makes toys for them.

In the present, one of the marchers mocks Baby Kochamma and makes her wave the Marxist flag. This incident leads Baby Kochamma to hate Velutha. The trains pass and they continue their journey.

CHAPTER 3 - BIG MAN THE LALTAIN AND SMALL MAN THE MOMBATTI

The narrative shifts to 1993. The narrator muses something a man told Estha about dreams:"Big Man the Lantern, Small man the Tallow-stick. Estha enters the home and Rahel follows him to Ammu's old room. She watches Estha undress and touches his ear but he does not react.

CHAPTER 4 - ABHILASH TALKIES

The narrative continues from 1969. The family reaches the theatre for watching *The Sound of Music* and the movie had already begun. Since Estha was singing along the songs and disturbing everyone, he is sent out to the lobby by Ammu. He sings even there and wakes up the "Orangedrink Lemondrink Man". The man becomes angry at first but then coaxes Estha to come behind the counter for a free drink. He enquires to Estha regarding his home. While Estha drinks the lemon drink, he makes him hold his penis, ejaculates into his hand, wipes it off and sends him back to the movie. Estha feels traumatised and unclean after this incident. Estha is taken to bathroom by Ammu as he feels nauseous and later taken for a lemon drink at the same man's counter. The Orangedrink Lemondrink Man mentions in his conversation to Ammu that he knows exactly where their factory is. This frightens Estha even more.

They take taxi to hotel and Rahel is worried that Ammu might love Sophie Mol more than her due to her earlier misbehaviour in the theatre. Estha still feels sick and goes to Rahel's room and they sleep hugging each other. Chacko spends his night thinking about Sophie Mol, Margaret, Velutha and Comrade K.N.M.Pillai. The Comrade had been instigating Chacko's workers to revolt against him.

CHAPTER 5 - GOD'S OWN COUNTRY

The narrative shifts to 1993. Rahel walks around Ayemenem and notices the effects of modernisation on Ayemenem. While on her walk, she meets Comrade Pillai and they have a conversation regarding his son, Lenin. He shows her a photo of Lenin, Estha, Sophie Mol and Rahel which was taken days before Sophie Mol died.

CHAPTER 6 - COCHIN KANGAROOS

Back in 1969, Rahel and Estha are asked to display their best behaviours as Sophie Mol is arriving. Estha is still traumatised by what had happened to him at the theatre. Sophie Mol and Margaret arrive at the airport and Chacko is happy to see them. On their way back, Baby Kochamma makes the twins sing song to show off their English pronunciation.

CHAPTER 7- WISDOM EXERCISE NOTEBOOKS

In 1993 Rahel goes through Pappachi's study and finds their Wisdom Exercise Notebooks along with many other things. It also had the corrections made by Ammu. Rahel remembers the last time she met Ammu. Ammu had been kicked out of her home and she visits her home after being fired from the job of the receptionist for being sick often. Ammu kept coughing phlegm. Later Ammu died in a lodge at the age of thirty one and had to be cremated as the church won't bury her. It was Chacko and Rahel who took her body to crematorium.

CHAPTER 8- WELCOME HOME, OUR SOPHIE MOL

The story shifts to 1969 where Mammachi, who is blind, plays her violin and waits for Sophie Mol at Ayemenem. Chacko had become her only love from the day he stopped Pappachi from beating her. Thus she ignores the affairs of Chacko with the factory workers calling them "a man's need".

A cake is made for Sophie Mol and when the car arrives, everyone gathers around them to see her. Rahel sees Velutha and slips to play with him. When she questions him regarding his presence in the march, he says that she might have seen his twin, Urumban. Velutha and Ammu notice each other's beauty and the fact that both of them have grown up. Kochu Maria prasises Sophie Mol and this upsets Rahel.

CHAPTER 9- MRS.PILLAI, MRS. EAPEN, MRS. RAJAGOPALAN

In 1993 Rahel remembers how Sophie Mol had told Chacko that she loved Joe more and how she felt lonely when the twins left her out. So, Estha and Rahel take he along with them while going to visit Velutha. They put make up and pretend to be ladies- Mrs. Pillai, Mrs. Eapen and Mrs. Rajagopalan. Velutha makes wooden spoons for them.

Rahel watches Estha in his room and thinks of the twins' troubled past and Velutha became a victim of everything. She steps into pickle factory and thinks how "things can change in a day".

CHAPTER 10- THE RIVER IN THE BOAT

In 1969 when Sophie Mol had arrived, Estha had gone to the pickle factory and thinking that the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man could visit him anytime since he knows his location. Two thoughts cross his mind- "Anything can happen to anyone" and" it is best to be prepared." He wishes for a boat to cross the Meenchal river and go to the History House to escape the Orangedrink Lemondrink Man. Rahel joins him in his plan. The twins sneak out to visit the History House when Ammu takes her nap. They discover a damaged overturned boat by the side of river. They take it to Velutha's house for mending it. In Velutha's house only his brother Kuttapen had been there. Later, Velutha helps them to fix their boat and realizes that he could only think of Ammu when he sees the twins.

CHAPTER 11- THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

Ammu is still napping and she sees a dream of a one armed man whom she believes to be the "God of Small Things". The twins are trying to wake up Ammus thinkimg that she is having a nightmare. She says that she was happy in her dream. She notices the twins covered in saw dust and warns them about going to Velutha's house. Ammu realizes that Velutha was the God of Small Things. Ammu goes to the bathroom and looks at herself in the mirror and thinks of what future holds for her being a manless woman in Ayemenem.

CHAPTER 12- KOCHU THOMBAN

It is 1993 and Rahel reaches the Ayemenem temple. Kochu Thomban, the Ayemenem elephant is tethered outside. When she enters, the Kathakali has already begun. The story of *Mahabharatha* is being told. The episode shows Kunti meeting Karna to make him promise that he will not kill his brothers. Estha also enters the premise. As Bhima (performer) kills Dushasana brutally in the act, twins recognise the mad violence as the same violence from the Terror. The narrator muses that men are more savage than beasts.

CHAPTER 13- THE PESSIMIST AND THE OPTIMIST

IN 1969 Sophie Mol wakes up and thinks about Joe. She sees a picture of Margaret and Chacko on their wedding day. The narration shifts to the relationship between Chacko and Margaret. Chacko had met Margaret when he had gone to England to study. He met her in a café where she was working as a waitress. They begin to date and get married. They got married against Margaret's family's consent and Chacko did not inform his family about the marriage at all. Soon they started having financial troubles and Margaret met Joe who was opposite of Chacko and fell in love with him. After Sophie Mol was born, she asked for a divorce from Chacko. Chacko returned to India and started teaching in a college. After Pappachi's death, he moved to Ayemenem to take over the pickle factory. Margaret Kochamma was working as a teacher when Joe died in an accident. That's when Chacko invites them to Ayemenem for the holidays. The narrator tells that Margaret never forgave herself for bringing Sophie Mol to India.

On the morning of Sophie Mol's death, all three children had been missing, Margaret and Chacko had gone to Cochin to book the plane tickets, Ammu was locked in her room and the river was swollen with recent rain. Mammachi and Baby Kochamma get the news that a fisherman had found Sophie Mol's body. The previous afternoon, Vellya Paapen had come to the Ipe house drunk and crying in heavy rain and told Mammachi what he had seen- Velutha and Ammu are lovers and every night they take a little boat across river to the History House. Many have seen this and the whole village knows about it. Baby Kochamma gets to know of the whole incident. Baby Kochamma, Mammachi and Kochu Maria trick Ammu and lock her in her bedroom and they plan to send for Velutha to make him leave. But by then Sophie Mol's body is discovered.

Baby Kochamma goes to the police station tells Inspector Thomas Mathew that Velutha came to their house and tried to rape Ammu. She mentions that disappearance of the twins and Sophie Mol's death are also the fault of Velutha. The inspector calls Comrade Pilai to make sure that Velutha doesn't have any important political connections. Comrade Pillai answers in negative and does not tell him that Veluth had shown up at his house the previos night. When Margaret and Chacko return from Cochin, they find Sophie Mol's dead body. The narration shifts to two weeks before Sophie Mol's death.

CHAPTER 14- WORK IS STRUGGLE

Two weeks before Sophie Mol's death, Chacko goes to meet Comrade Pillai at his home. There he meets Mrs. Pillai, Latha (her neice) and Lenin(her son). When Comrade Pillai comes, he orders some new labels for the Pickle factory and asks if Velutha was there in the march. Comrade Pillai suggests Chacko to send Velutha away as other workers are uncomfortable with his caste but Chacko does not agree to it as basically its Velutha who runs the facory.

On the night of Sophie Mol's death Mammachi sends for Velutha and when he arrives, she insults him and spits on him. Velutha goes to Comrade Pillai's house for help but he is sent back. Velutha walks to the river as if in trance.

CHAPTER 15- THE CROSSING

Velutha swims across the river to reach the History House thinking that things would become better later.

CHAPTER 16- A FEW HOURS LATER

When Ammu was locked in her bedroom, out of frustration she calls the twins "millstones around her neck". Later, Estha and Rahel decide to run away to History House. Estha had already equipped History House with supplies in case they needed to escape the Orangedrink Lemondrinkman. Sophie Mol convinces the twins to take her along with them. The three go down the river in their boat but due to strong currents the boat hits a log and tips over. Estha and Rahel manage to swim to shore whereas Sophie Mol disappears. After searching for her, the twins go to the History House and lie down traumatized without realizing that Velutha was already sleeping nearby.

CHAPTER 17- COCHIN HARBOUR TERMINUS

In 1993 Estha sits on his bed and examines the body and face of Rahel as she looks like Ammu. He remembers leaving her twenty three years earlier and the sights and sounds of Cochin Harbour terminus train station while he was leaving Kerala. He also remembers how an article had come in the newspaper where Comrade Pillai claimed that Velutha was framed as he was a party member. Later, Comrade Pillai led an overthrow of Paradise Pickles.

CHAPTER 18-THE HISTORY HOUSE

In 1969, police reach the History House and wake Velutha up by stomping him with their boots. The children wake up and realize that Velutha was also there along with them. Velutha is beaten almost to death and his blood smells like old roses to the twins. Rahel tries to make Estha believe that it's not Velutha but his twin Urmban who is being beaten up, but Estha is not convinced. It's only now that the policemen notice the supplies and get worried thinking that maybe Velutha did not kidnap them. They take all the supplies with them and drag Velutha out of the forest.

CHAPTER 19- SAVING AMMU

Estha and Rahel are taken to the Police Station and the Inspector understands that there was something wrong in the claims of Baby Kochamma and he sends for her. He tells her that Velutha might die of his injusries and if Ammu does not file a complaint or the twins do not identify him as their kidnapper, he would have to charge her. Terrified, Baby Kochamma blackmails the twins by saying that if they do not testify against Velutha, they would have to go to jail. Estha goes to the prison and says "yes" to the question asked by the inspector. Velutha dies that night in prison. Worried that her plan might fall apart, Baby Kochamma preys on Chacko's grief and manages to separate the twins and send Ammu away.

CHAPTER 20- THE MADRAS MAIL

Story moves to the day Estha was sent away on a train to Madras. Ammu promises him that once she gets a job, all three of them would live together. But that never happens. In 1993, the twins lie together in bed and have sex. Narrative shifts to 1969 on the day Sophie Mol arrived. Ammu puts the twins to bed and longs for "The God of Small Things"

CHAPTER 21- THE COST OF LIVING

That night Ammu feels restless and goes to the banks of Meenchal River hoping to see Velutha there. Velutha would also be floating in the river thinking of Ammu. On seeing her, he goes towards her. She kisses him. Although he knows that he could lose everything, he has sex with her. For thirteen nights after that they keep meeting each other and discuss only small things like the spider in History House or the ant bites on their back. At the end of each night, they promise each other to meet "tomorrow".

7.3 CONCLUSION

Apart from the story, it is the storytelling that makes this novel a class apart. Arundathi Roy enhances the language to make it her own. She makes use of metaphors, similes and imageries to do so. She breaks and remoulds the English language to suit her purpose. Even the constant shift of narrative from 1993 to 1969 and back again adds to the beauty of the novel. The novel is written in such a way that the reader is intrigued from the very first chapter. All important events are mentioned in the first chapter of the novel itself. What keeps the reader intrigued is what lead to the events mentioned

in the first chapter. It is a heart-breaking novel which touches many important themes and issues.

7.4 IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

1. Comment on the structure of the novel.
2. Explain how Baby Kochamma acts as a catalyst in the events of the novel which ultimately leads to the twins getting separated.
3. Elucidate upon the relationship that the twins shared with each other.
4. Explain the position of Ammu in the society.

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8

CRITICAL STUDY OF SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*- PART I

Unit Structure:

8.0 Objectives of the Unit

8.1 Brief Biography of Salma Rushdie

8.2 Historical Context of *Midnight's Children*

8.3 Introduction

8.4 Plot Summary

8.5 Characters

8.6 Questions

8.7 References

8.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE UNIT:

1. To introduce Salman Rushdie, a renowned post-independent writer belongs to Indian Diaspora.
2. To study his award winning and well acclaimed novel Midnight's Children.
3. To understand the plot summary and characters of the novel.

8.1 BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF SALMAN RUSHDIE:

Ahmed Salman Rushdie was born into a wealthy Kashmiri-Muslim family in Bombay before India declared independence from British rule. His father was a skilled lawyer and businessman, and his mother was a teacher. Early in life, he was educated at a private school in Mumbai and later attended a British boarding school. Ultimately, Rushdie studied at King's College, University of Cambridge, where he earned an M.A. in history. He began his career in London in the 1970s as a copywriter for numerous advertising agencies and published his first two books during this time, including *Midnight's Children*. Following the success of *Midnight's Children*—which subsequently won the Booker Prize in 1981 and the Best of the Bookers in 1993 and 2008—Rushdie began writing full-time and has since published several award-winning novels, essays, and short stories, including *The Satanic Verses* and *East, West*. In 1983, he was elected as a fellow to the Royal Society of Literature, the United Kingdom's premier literary organization, earning him the credentials FRSL. Following the 1988 publication of *The Satanic Verses*, a controversial novel concerning Islam and a controversial Muslim tradition, Ayatollah Khomeini, the spiritual

leader of Iran, issued a *fatwa*, or bounty, on Rushdie's head for blasphemy. After Rushdie was forced to spend years in hiding, the former president of Iran declared the *fatwa* finished; however, the order was never officially lifted, and the bounty was recently increased in 2016 to over three million dollars. In 1999, Rushdie was awarded Commandeur de l'Ordre des Arts et des Lettres of France, the highest form of French recognition for contribution to the arts, and in June of 2007, he was knighted by the Queen of England for accomplishments in literature. Since 2000, Rushdie has lived exclusively in New York City, where he was named the Distinguished Writer in Residence at New York University in 2015. He entered into four marriages, each ending in divorce, and has two sons, Zafar, born in 1979, and Milan, born in 1997.

8.2 HISTORICAL CONTEXT OF *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*:

Major occurrences within protagonist Saleem Sinai's life are juxtaposed alongside Indian and other world events, and Rushdie even incorporates actual historical figures—such as Indira Gandhi, the former Prime Minister of India—as characters within the novel. Arguably, one of the most important historical events in *Midnight's Children* is Indira Gandhi's Emergency, a country-wide state of emergency which took place in India from 1975 to 1977. Gandhi recommended the Emergency to the President of India, Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed, in response to growing civil unrest and violence, and it was so declared on June 25, 1975. The Emergency suspended the citizens' right to vote, giving Gandhi absolute power—and the ability to rule by decree. She censored the press and imprisoned those who opposed her, including other politicians. Many human rights violations took place during the Emergency, such as a forced sterilization program planned and executed by Gandhi's son, Sanjay, a fellow Indian politician. The Emergency officially ended on March 23, 1977, after Gandhi released the last political prisoners and allowed citizens to vote. *Midnight's Children* is a critical look at this dark time in Indian history and the tyrannical rulings of Indira Gandhi, who sued Rushdie for libel in 1984. Surprisingly, Gandhi's lawsuit did not seek to ban the book or strike her name from it; instead, she sought to remove a single sentence which implied that her husband died as a result of her neglect, hence her nickname throughout the novel as the Widow. Gandhi won her case and the offending sentence was removed from the published text.

8.3 INTRODUCTION:

Midnight's Children is a 1981 magical realism novel by British American novelist of Indian origin, Salman Rushdie. The story follows Saleem, a child born at the moment of India's independence who possesses strange powers. The novel won many awards, including the Booker of Bookers Prize, which was awarded to the best all-time winner of the Booker Prize on the award's 40th anniversary. *Midnight's Children* has been adapted for theater, radio, and film.

8.4 PLOT SUMMARY:

Saleem Sinai is the first-person narrator of *Midnight's Children*. His companion Padma listens to him telling the story of his family's life, which he hopes to finish before he dies. Saleem was born at the moment India gained its independence from the British Empire, at exactly midnight on August 15, 1947. Since that moment, his life has been tied to the fate of his country.

Saleem begins his story with his grandfather, Aadam Aziz. In 1915, Aadam has returned to Kashmir, his homeland, after studying medicine in Germany. While living with his parents, he regularly treats Naseem, the daughter of a wealthy man named Ghani. However, Ghani will only allow Aadam to treat Naseem through a small hole in a sheet to preserve her honor. After years of treating Naseem, Aadam knows that he loves her. He sees her face for the first time on the final day of World War I. Aadam marries Naseem and moves to Agra. There, Aadam experiences the violent suppression of Indian protests in the name of independence. The couple has three daughters named Alia, Mumtaz, and Emerald and two sons named Mustapha and Hanif. Following the death of Aadam's friend Mian Abdullah, Aadam agrees to shelter Mian's secretary Nadir Kahn in his basement. While hiding from the authorities, Nadir falls in love with Mumtaz. The couple marries in secret, but after two years of marriage Aadam discovers that his daughter is still a virgin. Aadam is outraged and Nadir flees from the house while Emerald runs to tell her lover, a military officer named Major Zulfikar. Though Nadir is not caught, Emerald marries Zulfikar. Shortly after, Mumtaz meets Ahmed Sinai. Ahmed had been courting Alia, but he marries Mumtaz instead; she agrees to change her name to Amina and move to Delhi with her new husband.

In Delhi, Amina becomes pregnant with her first child. She visits a fortune teller, who informs her that her son will never be older or younger than India, among other more cryptic predictions. At the same time, Ahmed's business is targeted because he is Muslim. When he fails to pay a bribe, his warehouse burns down. The family moves to Bombay, purchasing a house on an estate that belonged to an Englishman named William Methwold, who plans to return to Britain following India's independence. A beggar named Wee Willie Winkie visits the estate often. He reveals that, like Amina, his wife Vanita is pregnant. However, he does not know that his wife had a secret affair with Methwold. Amina and Vanita give birth on the night India gains its independence. As the babies lay in the maternity ward, the midwife Mary Pereira switches the name tags in an act of revolutionary solidarity with her boyfriend, Joseph D'Costa. The baby from the rich family will grow up with the poor beggar while the beggar's son will grow up in the wealthy household. Feeling guilty, Mary leaves her job as a midwife and becomes a nanny in the family. Saleem, the son of Vanita and Wee Willie Winkie, will now grow up with the rich family. The timing of Saleem's birth ties him to India's history. He is one of many babies born in the hour after independence. A few years later, Amina gives birth to a daughter, who is nicknamed the Brass Monkey.

Saleem's large nose and the expectations placed on him by the circumstances of his birth inspire the other boys in his school to bully him, which turns Saleem into a shy boy. One morning, he seeks out the comfort of his usual hiding spot inside a laundry basket. He then overhears his mother having a strange telephone conversation, which turns out to be with her former husband. She is outraged at Saleem's eavesdropping and punishes him by forbidding him from speaking for an entire day. During Saleem's day of silence, he realizes he can hear voices in his head. Eventually, he realizes that he has magical powers. He can use his telepathy to hear other people's thoughts, and he uses this power to contact the hundreds of other children born in the hour after India's independence. They call themselves Midnight's Children, and they all have powers, the strength of which depends on how close to midnight the child was born. Saleem discovers that Wee Willie Winkie's son, Shiva, has a special capacity for violence and very strong knees. Saleem and Shiva do not see eye-to-eye. Saleem's true parentage is revealed when his parents are asked to donate blood to him after an accident. Afterward, he is sent to live with Aunt Pia and Uncle Hanif. He stays with them for some time, then returns home. After Saleem leaves, Hanif dies by suicide, and the family mourns his death. The mourning period prompts Mary to confess to switching the babies' name tags. When Ahmed becomes a bitter, violent alcoholic, Amina takes her children to Pakistan to live with her sister Emerald. Saleem sees Emerald's husband General Zulfikar launch a coup against the government in Pakistan.

The Brass Monkey becomes a famous singer in Pakistan and becomes known as Jamila Singer. Ahmed suffers a heart attack, so Amina and the children return to Bombay. During this time, Saleem's nose becomes completely blocked. When he has an operation to fix the issue, he loses his telepathic powers but gains an amazing sense of smell. Saleem can even smell emotions. After India loses a war to China, the family moves back to Pakistan. Jamila continues her music career and becomes the most famous singer in the country. When war breaks out in Pakistan, most of Saleem's family is killed by an air raid. Saleem is hit in the head and loses his memories. Unsure of his identity, Saleem is recruited into the Pakistani army. His sense of smell makes him a valuable asset, as he can smell danger. Saleem becomes involved in the Pakistan Civil War, in which the Pakistani Army commits atrocities in the country now known as Bangladesh. Saleem disappears into the jungle with his unit, and when they emerge, he reunites with one of the Midnight's Children, a witch named Parvati. She invites him to live in an enclave of magicians in Delhi, a community led by a man named Picture Singh.

After Saleem refuses to marry her, Parvati has an affair with Shiva and becomes pregnant with his child. Saleem agrees to marry the now-pregnant Parvati. At the same time, the Prime Minister of India launches a sterilization campaign in the country. The army attacks the magicians, and the inhabitants are forcibly sterilized. Parvati and many others die. Under torture, Saleem shares the names of the rest of the Midnight's Children, who are also sterilized. When the Prime Minister calls an election, however, she loses. The Midnight's Children are freed. Saleem

finds Parvati's son with Picture Singh. They go to Bombay and Picture challenges a famous snake charmer to a duel. Saleem discovers that Mary Pereira now works at a chutney factory in Bombay. He joins her and meets Padma in the factory. With his story complete, Saleem agrees to marry Padma. Just as he prophesied, he turns to dust and dies on the day of his wedding and the anniversary of India's independence.

8.5 CHARACTERS:

Saleem Sinai

Saleem, the story's protagonist and narrator, is the living embodiment of the newly independent country of India. Rushdie's novel is largely allegorical, and the character of Saleem is the personification of his country—diverse, conflicted, and rooted in religion. Born at the precise moment of India's independence from British colonialism, Saleem is endowed with the supernatural power of telepathy. In addition to connecting him with the Midnight's Children Conference—the other children born during the midnight hour of India's independence and the metaphorical "mirror of the nation"—Saleem's telepathy gives him incredible insight as he tells the story of his life, beginning with his grandfather, Aadam Aziz, and culminating with Saleem's son, Aadam Sinai. Saleem is the manager of a pickle factory and is also a writer, and he is determined to preserve his story before he dies, a victim of "too much history." He begins to crumble and crack "like an old jug," a reflection of India's partitioning and division along lines of religion, language, and class, and it is slowly killing him. Saleem's story is repeatedly complicated by Shiva, the story's antagonist. Shiva, who is also born at the precise moment of India's independence, is Saleem's only competition as leader of the Midnight's Children Conference, and he is determined to undo all of Saleem's efforts to discover the true purpose of the children and their varied powers. Saleem's ayah, Mary Pereira, a former midwife at the hospital where Saleem and Shiva are born, switches the two infants just moments after their birth in "her own private revolutionary act," swapping rich with poor, forever changing the lives of everybody associated with her fated alteration. Ironically, despite Saleem's true parentage, he physically resembles Aadam Aziz—who is technically *Shiva's* biological grandfather—inheriting his bulbous nose, "Kashmiri blue eyes," and his inability to either "believe or disbelieve in God."

Shiva

The story's antagonist and Saleem Sinai's alter ego. Like Saleem, Shiva is also born at the precise moment of India's independence from British rule, and he is likewise endowed with a magical power, though Saleem's power of telepathy is stronger than Shiva's gift of war. Shiva, the supposed son of Wee Willie Winkie and his wife Vanita, is named after the gods of destruction and procreation, and is born with a set of "menacingly knocking knees," which are reflective of his power. Shortly after Saleem and Shiva's birth, a midwife named Mary Pereira swaps the two babies in her own "private revolutionary act," effectively switching rich with poor. Saleem is

brought up in Shiva's rightful life, and he assumes Shiva's role as the leader of the Midnight Children's Conference, the gathering of all the children born during the midnight hour of India's independence, and the metaphorical "mirror of the nation" of India. Shiva repeatedly tries to usurp Saleem's power, and he sabotages all of Saleem's efforts to identify the children's purpose in the newly independent India. Shiva is also the biological father of Parvati-the-witch's son. Parvati traps Shiva into impregnating her, knowing that he will lose interest in her after she is pregnant, allowing an impotent Saleem to claim her fatherless baby. Shiva, who ultimately becomes a soldier in the Indian Army, destroys the magicians' ghetto where Saleem and Parvati live with their newborn son during the state of emergency declared by Indira Gandhi, and Parvati is killed in the process. After Gandhi's emergency, Shiva is never heard from again, and Saleem continues to raise Parvati's son.

Aadam Aziz

Saleem Sinai's grandfather, Reverend Mother's husband, and Amina Sinai's father. Saleem's story begins with Aadam thirty years before India's independence, and he is a reflection of the many effects of colonialism on the colonized. For example, Aadam is westernized—meaning he has been educated in European schools—yet he still finds value in traditional Indian culture. He also abandons his Muslim faith, and similar to his future country of India, supports a secular state instead of a state-sponsored religion. Like Saleem, Aadam has a massive nose, "Kashmiri blue eyes," and supports a more progressive India. He encourages his wife to exit purdah, and he assists in Mahatma Gandhi's hartal. Allegorically, Aadam represents the struggle of modern India under the continued control of the British and beyond independence. Many of Aadam's struggles aren't resolved with liberation alone, such as his ambivalence in his belief in God, and these struggles are passed on to Saleem, where they are central in the development of a new nation. Aadam lives to be an old man and dies, deranged and bitter, under the care of his wife.

Naseem Ghani / Reverend Mother

Saleem Sinai's grandmother, Amina Sinai's mother, and Aadam Aziz's wife. Naseem is first introduced when her father, Mr. Ghani, tricks Aadam into falling in love with her. Using the "magical and sacred" allure of a perforated sheet, Ghani summons Aadam, a doctor, to examine his daughter from behind a purdah, and after many years and several fake illnesses, Aadam and Naseem fall in love. Their love, however, is doomed from the beginning, and their union is an unhappy one. After their marriage, Naseem morphs into Reverend Mother, a particularly unpleasant and unattractive version of herself who rules over her family like a tyrant, imposing punishments and leveling insults. Reverend Mother is resentful of Aadam's support of her exit from purdah, and she serves to personify the pre-independence concept of womanhood and femininity in India. She is dedicated to her domestic responsibilities and her religion, which she equates with morality, and she cares very little about politics or the

oppression of others. Reverend Mother is killed in the Indo-Pakistani War, when a bomb is dropped on her during an air raid.

Mumtaz Aziz / Amina Sinai

Aadam Aziz and Reverend Mother's daughter, Nadir Khan and Ahmed Sinai's wife, and Saleem Sinai's mother. Mumtaz, an Indian of a darker complexion, is described as "a blackie," whose skin tone makes it difficult for her mother to love her. She meets and falls in love with Nadir Khan, an impotent poet, whom she is forced to divorce in the name of motherhood. Mumtaz then marries Ahmed Sinai, her sister Alia's supposed suitor, who forces Mumtaz to change her name to Amina. Amina and Ahmed go on to have two children, the Brass Monkey and Saleem, but she is never able to love Ahmed in the same way that she loves Nadir. As Ahmed's wife, Amina continues to secretly see Nadir until Homi Catrack is murdered by a jealous husband for having an affair with his wife. Effectively warned of the potential consequences of infidelity, Amina refuses to see Nadir again, growing "prematurely old" before she is later killed in an air-raid during the Indo-Pakistani War.

Nadir Khan / Qasim Khan

The personal secretary of the Hummingbird and Mumtaz Aziz's first husband. Nadir, an amateur writer of little skill, is described as a "rhymeless poet" and a "verbless bard," and he is a known coward. He runs away frightened when the Hummingbird is killed by unknown assassins, and he willingly divorces Mumtaz when her mother, Reverend Mother, objects to their sexless marriage on account of his impotence. After leaving Mumtaz and changing his name and identity to Qasim Khan, Nadir becomes an official candidate of the Communist Party in India's 1957 election, narrowly losing to the All-India Congress. During Mumtaz's second marriage to Ahmed Sinai, Nadir secretly pursues Mumtaz and frequently calls her, arousing the suspicions of her children, Saleem and the Brass Monkey. He finally exits *Midnight's Children* after Commander Sabarmati murders Homi Catrack for having an affair with his wife, Lila. Homi's murder effectively warns Mumtaz of the consequences of infidelity, and she stops accepting Nadir's phone calls and secretly meeting up with him.

Ahmed Sinai

Amina's second husband and protagonist Saleem's father. Ahmed is first introduced as the suitor of Amina's sister, Alia; however, Ahmed quickly falls in love with Amina after she is divorced from her first husband, and he never does propose to Alia. Ahmed has already been married and divorced by the time he marries Amina, and Amina's mother, Reverend Mother, dislikes him from the start. Ahmed and Amina's marriage is generally an unhappy union, in which Amina continues to pine over her first husband, and Ahmed sinks deeper and deeper into alcoholism and depression. Both of Ahmed's children, Saleem and the Brass Monkey, have a strained relationship with their father, and he is separated from his children for four years when their mother moves them to Pakistan without him. Ahmed's

relationship with his family finally improves after he suffers a cardiac complication, but for most of the story he alienates himself from his family. He is killed after moving to Pakistan in an air-raid during the Indo-Pakistani War.

The Brass Monkey / Jamila Singer

Saleem Sinai's sister and the daughter of Ahmed and Amina. The Brass Monkey is a feisty child who frequently sets fire to others people's shoes (while they're wearing them), and she forms a fierce alliance with her brother. The Brass Monkey is Saleem's opposite; she is beautiful whereas Saleem is ugly, and their parents initially favor their famous son and his historical birth over their headstrong daughter. While living in Pakistan, the Brass Monkey begins a singing career and becomes Jamila Singer. As Jamila, the Brass Monkey is the "Angel of Pakistan," and even her own brother falls in love with her. After Saleem is brained by a spittoon during an air-raid and suffers amnesia, Jamila delivers him to the Pakistani Army where he fights alongside other Pakistanis until he suddenly discovers his true identity and escapes the army, finding his way back to India. Despite being born a Muslim, the Brass Monkey is attracted to Mary Pereira's Catholic faith, and she joins a nunnery in the wake of the Indo-Pakistani War.

Mary Pereira

Saleem Sinai's ayah, or nanny, and his second mother-figure. Mary is initially employed as a midwife in the hospital where Saleem and Shiva are born, and in a testament to her love for Joseph D'Costa, a notorious Communist, she swaps baby Saleem with baby Shiva, her own "private revolutionary act," switching rich with poor. In her guilt, Mary, a devout Catholic, offers her services to Saleem's mother, Amina, as an ayah. Throughout the years, Mary becomes increasingly close with Saleem and his family, making her confession difficult, and when she finally confesses after being driven nearly mad by her guilt, Mary runs away and lives with her mother. She remains absent until Saleem finally reveals her as the owner of the pickle factory where he works, and the ayah of his own son, Aadam Sinai.

Parvati-the-witch / Laylah

Saleem Sinai's wife and the mother of his son, Aadam. Parvati is a fellow child of midnight, and she is endowed with the powers of the illuminatus, or "the genuine gifts of conjuration and sorcery." Parvati tricks Shiva into impregnating her, knowing the he will lose interest once she is pregnant, allowing an impotent Saleem to step in as Aadam's father. Parvati is killed during Indira Gandhi's Emergency.

Padma

Saleem Sinai's companion and his assumed lover, although he is impotent. Saleem reads his story aloud to Padma, and she is one of the strong and independent women working in Mary Pereira's pickle factory. She intends

on marrying Saleem, he presumably spends the rest of his short life with her.

Aadam Sinai

Parvati-the-witch and Saleem Sinai's son. Aadam, the biological son of Shiva, Saleem's arch enemy, is born during Indira Gandhi's Emergency, after which his mother is killed. Aadam is raised by his ayah, Mary Pereira, and he represents a new generation of Midnight's Children. This new generation of children, born to the first children of midnight, are an entirely new group of children who, similar to their parents, are endowed with magical powers. The children have the potential to transform postcolonial India into "the third principle," Saleem's vision of a way for Indians to overcome "the endless duality of masses-and-classes, capital-and-labor, them-and-us," finally coming together, united.

Major Zulfikar

Initially Brigadier Dodson's A.D.C. (an official assistant to a high-ranking military officer), Zulfikar falsely suspects Nadir Khan of involvement in the Hummingbird's assassination. Zulfikar falls in love with Aadam Aziz's daughter, Emerald, and promises not to press charges on Aadam for harboring Nadir if he agrees to allow him to marry her. Zulfikar and Emerald are married and move to Pakistan after India's independence, where he later becomes a major in the Pakistani Army and is instrumental in a coup to overthrow the Pakistani government. Zulfikar serves as a stand-in father to his nephew Saleem Sinai, before being murdered by his own son, Zafar, a young man who repeatedly wets his pants growing up and is generally rejected by his father.

Tai

The old boatman who ferries people and goods across Dal and Nageen Lakes in Kashmir. Tai is the personification of Old India, and he represents a time and place that is untouched by British colonialism and other Western influences. Tai becomes angry with Aadam Aziz when he returns from a German medical school a changed and modern man, reflecting Tai's own fixed identity as a strictly Eastern character. Tai has an affinity for storytelling, and his incredibly long life serves as an endless source for the stories of India's rich history, which he happily shares with Aadam in his youth. Notably, it is Tai who tells Ilse Lubin of the place in Dal Lake where European women go to drown, and after her suicide he becomes sick with a mysterious illness, suggesting his guilt in connection with her death. Tai is killed in 1947, when he is shot during the Indian and Pakistani disputes over the territory of Kashmir, but he lives on through his stories and Hanif Aziz, Aadam's son who inherits the boatman's infectious laugh.

William Methwold

The former owner of Methwold's Estate in Bombay, where protagonist Saleem Sinai grows up. Methwold sells the four mansions that make up his estate as the British begin to exit India in preparation for

independence. Saleem's parents purchase Buckingham Villa, a mansion on the estate, for a cheap price. Methwold insists that Saleem's parents, Ahmed and Amina, purchase and retain his mansion with all its contents, and he refuses to make the transaction official until India's independence on August 15, 1947. Methwold's strange requests mirror British colonialism and the European influence left behind in India, even after independence, as the residents of Methwold's Estate continue to observe his customs long after he is gone. Ironically, Methwold is also the biological father of Saleem. After Mary Pereira switches baby Saleem with baby Shiva, it is revealed that Saleem's true father is none other than Methwold, who had carried on an affair with Saleem's biological mother, the wife of Wee Willie Winkie. Following India's independence, Methwold leaves Bombay and is never heard from again.

Dr. Narlikar

A child-hating gynecologist, Ahmed Sinai's business partner, and fellow resident of Methwold's Estate. Narlikar owns a hospital in Bombay, and he delivers both Saleem and Shiva. With the help of Ahmed, Narlikar endeavors to design and mass produce tetrapods, physical structures built over the sea and supported by four legs. Narlikar is obsessed with the concept of tetrapods, which make it possible for him to reclaim land from the sea, and this obsession ultimately kills him. A notorious misogynist, Narlikar becomes enraged when a group of women "perform the rite of puja" near one of his tetrapods and he attacks them, causing the structure to become unstable in the chaos, pinning him underwater and drowning him. Ironically, Narlikar's heirs end up being a group of strong and independent women who move into his apartment and take over his business interests. Narlikar's women ultimately buy all of the property on Methwold's Estate and plan to demolish it and erect a skyscraper in its place, a symbol of Bombay's modern progress.

Aadam Aziz's Mother

A traditional Kashmiri woman who must exit purdah and support her family after the death of her husband, Aadam's father. As the owner of a gemstone business, Aadam's mother must work directly with the public unveiled; otherwise, she claims, the customers will not trust her if they cannot see her face. Aadam's mother complains that her naked face causes her great pains and boils, yet she continues to work unveiled with the public. She resents Mr. Ghani and Naseem's attempts to trap Aadam into marrying Naseem, and she frequently makes Aadam feel guilty for agreeing to examine Naseem when she is herself sick with pain and boils because of her sacrifice.

Aadam Aziz's Father

The owner of a gemstone business who becomes housebound after a stroke, leaving his wife, Aadam's mother, to tend to his professional affairs. Aadam returns to Kashmir after medical school to find his father permanently afflicted by his stroke, and his mental status gradually worsens until he spends most of his time making bird sounds, calling in several types

of birds on a daily basis. Aadam's father falls ill and dies early in the story, followed soon by his wife.

Rani of Cooch Naheen

A wealthy Muslim woman who finances the Hummingbird's political campaign. Her name roughly translates to "the Queen of Nothing" in English, and she is Aadam's close friend and intellectual ally when the Reverend Mother refuses to discuss politics with him. Rani provides the lawyer and mullah, an Islamic advisor, when Aadam's daughter, Mumtaz, marries Nadir Kahn, the Hummingbird's personal secretary. She also gifts the couple a beautifully ornamented silver spittoon as a wedding gift, which the two spend countless happy hours playing hit-the-spittoon with. Rani is described as a pale woman who grows increasingly lighter as she suffers from an unknown illness, turning completely white by the time of her death, a phenomenon mirrored by postcolonial Indian businessmen. Rushdie's depiction of modern Indians turning white underscores the lasting influence of British colonialism on postcolonial India.

Mian Abdullah / The Hummingbird

A pro-Indian Muslim politician who creates the Free Islam Convocation, a gathering of Indian Muslims who disapprove of the dogmatism and intolerance frequently present in many traditional practitioners Islam. Also known as the Hummingbird, Abdullah has the strange habit of humming, a sound that rises and falls in direct relation to his work rate. Aadam Aziz fiercely supports his attempts to influence power and religion within British India. The Hummingbird is killed by assassins following his efforts to bring his Convocation to Agra, a stronghold of staunch Muslims.

Alia Aziz

The "wise child" of Aadam Aziz and Reverend Mother. Alia initially falls in love with Ahmed Sinai early in *Midnight's Children*; however, Ahmed avoids proposing to Alia and ultimately leaves her for her sister, Mumtaz, after Mumtaz is divorced by her first husband. Alia never forgives Mumtaz or Ahmed, and she bitterly folds her jealously and resentment into her cooking, infecting all who consume it. Alia moves to Pakistan after India's independence, and she is killed in an air-raid during the Indo-Pakistani War.

Mr. Ghani

A blind landowner in Kashmir and Naseem's father. Ghani tricks Aadam Aziz into falling in love with his daughter by setting him up. He repeatedly summons Aadam, a doctor, to his home under the pretenses of his daughter's feigned illnesses, forcing Aadam to examine Naseem through a perforated sheet, or purdah. The sheet becomes something "sacred and magical," and Aadam ultimately falls in love Naseem, just as Ghani has planned.

Homi Catrack

A movie executive, racetrack owner, and a fellow resident of Methwold's Estate. Homi is a widower who lives with his mentally ill daughter, Toxy, and he frequently has affairs with married women, including Pia Aziz and Lila Sabarmati. Saleem exposes Homi's affair with Lila to her husband, Commander Sabarmati, after Homi has an affair with his aunt and breaks her heart. Homi is ultimately murdered by Commander Sabarmati.

Evie Burns

A fellow resident of Methwold's Estate and Saleem Sinai's first love. Evie is an American who represents the European presence in postcolonial India. She is aggressive and mean, and after getting into a fight with the Brass Monkey over the cats on Methwold's Estate, Evie is sent back to America so that she doesn't have to mix with "savages."

The Widow / Indira Gandhi

The former Prime Minister of India and an actual historical figure. Gandhi is a corrupt leader, and she declares a state of emergency throughout the entire state of India simply to locate and destroy the Midnight Children's Conference. Following the climax of *Midnight's Children*, The Widow forcibly sterilizes Saleem and the other children of midnight.

Brigadier R. E. Dyer

A European officer in the British Indian Army, and an actual historical figure, responsible for the massacre in Amritsar. Dyer orders a squad of fifty troops to open fire in the middle of a peaceful protest during Gandhi's hartal, and Aadam Aziz is buried under a pile of dead bodies.

Lafifa Das

A young Hindu boy who makes a living pushing a peepshow through the streets of Agra. Lafifa is rescued by Amina Sinai when she stops an angry mob of Muslims from attacking him by announcing her pregnancy with Saleem. Lafifa repays her with the promise of a prophecy for her unborn child by his cousin, Shri Ramram Seth.

Dr. Narlikar's Women

The female heirs to Dr. Narlikar's fortune. After Narlikar's death, the women move into his apartment and take over his businesses, and begin buying up all of Methwold's Estate. The women intend to demolish the estate and erect a large skyscraper, the evidence of India's progress as a modern country.

8.6 QUESTIONS:

How reliable a narrator is Saleem?

What is the role of fate in this novel?

Is Shiva a sympathetic character?

What is the significance of impotence throughout the novel?

Is Saleem's crumbling death inevitable?

What role does religious imagery play in the novel?

What is the significance of Saleem's adoption of Parvati-the-witch's son?

How does Rushdie's narrative style reflect the novel's intentions?

Why do you think *Midnight's Children* is divided into three sections?

What will the future of Aadam Sinai's India in the novel look like? Will it be better than Saleem's? Worse? What does it have to do with abracadabra?

Why is time so disjointed in *Midnight's Children*?

Midnight's Children is a story within a story, and sometimes a story within a story within a story. Is it possible to tell Saleem's tale as just a normal plot? How would that change the novel and its message?

What is the significance of saffron and green right before Saleem's birth?

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9

CRITICAL STUDY OF SALMAN RUSHDIE'S *MIDNIGHT'S CHILDREN*- PART II

Unit Structure:

9.0 Objectives of the Unit

9.1 Major Themes

9.2 Traits of Magic Realism in the novel

9.3 References

9.0 OBJECTIVES OF THE UNIT:

1. To study the important themes of the novel *Midnight's Children.*
2. To analyse various literary aspects in the novel.
3. To understand the novelty and experimentation in the novel.
4. To study the use of magic realism in the novel.

9.1 MAJOR THEMES:

The Single and the Many

Born at the dawn of Indian independence and destined, upon his death, to break into as many pieces as there are citizens of India, Saleem Sinai manages to represent the entirety of India within his individual self. The notion that a single person could possibly embody a teeming, diverse, multitudinous nation like India encapsulates one of the novel's fundamental concerns: the tension between the single and the many. The dynamic relationship between Saleem's individual life and the collective life of the nation suggests that public and private will always influence one another, but it remains unclear whether they can be completely equated with one another. Throughout the novel, Saleem struggles to contain all of India within himself—to cram his personal story with the themes and stories of his country—only to disintegrate and collapse at the end of his attempt.

Politically speaking, the tension between the single and the many also marks the nation of India itself. One of the fastest growing nations in the world, India has always been an incredibly diverse. Its constitution recognizes twenty-two official languages, and the population practices religions as varied as Hinduism, Islam, Christianity, Sikhism, and Buddhism, among many others. Indian culture is similarly hybrid, having been influenced by

countless other cultures over the millennia of its development. At the same time, however, maintaining India's sprawling diversity in a peaceful fashion has often proved difficult: India's division into the Islamic nation of Pakistan and the secular, but mostly Hindu nation of India—a process known as Partition—remains the most striking example of the desire to contain and reduce India's plurality. In *Midnight's Children*, the child Saleem watches as protestors attempt to do divide the city of Bombay along linguistic lines, another attempt to categorize and cordon off multiplicity.

Saleem, a character who contains a multitude of experiences and sensitivities, stands in stark contrast to the protestors who demand their own language-based region, the strict monotheism of Pakistan, and Indira Gandhi's repression of contradictory dissension. His powers of telepathy allow him to transcend the barriers of language, while he himself—with his English blood, poor background, wealthy upbringing, and eclectic religious influeces—reflects India's diversity and range. The Midnight Children's Conference that he convenes is, in its initial phase, a model for pluralism and a testimony to the potential power inherent within coexisting diversity, which is a natural and definitive element of Indian culture. In *Midnight's Children*, the desire for singularity or purity—whether of religion or culture—breeds not only intolerance but also violence and repression.

The Unreliability of Memory and Narrative

Factual errors and dubious claims are essential aspects of Saleem's fantastic narrative. He willfully acknowledges that he misplaced Gandhi's death, an obviously seminal moment in India's history, as well as willfully misremembers the date of an election. He frets over the accuracy of his story and worries about future errors he might make. Yet, at the same time, after acknowledging his error, Saleem decides to maintain his version of events, since that's how they appeared to occur to him and now there can be no going back. Despite its potential historical inaccuracies, Saleem sees his story as being of equal importance as the world's most important religious texts. This is not only his story but also the story of India. The errors in his story, in addition to casting a shadow of doubt over some of what he claims, point to one of the novel's essential claims: that truth is not just a matter of verifiable facts. Genuine historical truth depends on perspective—and a willingness to believe. Saleem notes that memory creates its own truth, and so do narratives. Religious texts and history books alike stake their claim in truth not only because they are supported by facts but also because they have been codified and accepted upon, whether by time or faith. The version of history Saleem offers comes filtered through his perspective, just as every other version of history comes filtered through some alternate perspective. For Saleem, his version is as true as anything else that could be written, not just because this is the way he has arranged it, but because this is the version he believes.

Destruction vs. Creation

The battle between Saleem and Shiva reflects the ancient, mythological battle between the creative and destructive forces in the world. The enmity

and tension between the two begin at the moment of their simultaneous births. The reference to Shiva, the Hindu god of both destruction and procreation, reflects not only the tension between destruction and creation but also the inextricably bound nature of these two forces. Saleem, as the narrator of *Midnight's Children*, is responsible for creating the world we, as readers, are engaged in. He represents Brahma, the god of creation. What Saleem creates, however, is not life, but a story. By delivering Saleem into the hands of the Widow, Shiva is responsible for the destruction of the midnight's children, and yet, by fathering Aadam and hundreds of other children, he ensures the continuation of their legacy.

Truth and Storytelling

Self-proclaimed writer and pickle-factory manager Saleem Sinai is dying—cracking and crumbling under the stress of a mysterious illness—but before he does, he is determined to tell his story. With the "grand hope of the pickling of time," Saleem feverishly pens his autobiography, preserving his stories like jars of chutney, searching for truth and meaning within them. Born at the precise moment of India's independence and endowed with magical powers Saleem's remarkable story begins long before his Bombay birth and spans much of the subcontinent of India. Over a period of sixty years, he highlights Indian voices and stories traditionally silenced under British rule; however, *Midnight's Children* is first and foremost Saleem's story—his own "authentic taste of truth" of postcolonial India. Through Saleem's story, Rushdie argues the power of storytelling and the importance of the preservation of stories, ultimately suggesting that genuine truth is found within personal stories—not within history books.

The importance of Saleem's story is made clear throughout *Midnight's Children*, reflecting personal truths that are often neglected in objective history books. As the narrator, Saleem directly engages with the reader. He explicitly states his intention to tell his story, even beginning with the requisite "once upon a time," and makes plain his sense of urgency. Saleem is cracking "like an old jug" while his bones turn to dust. As one of the children of midnight—children born between the hours of midnight and one in the morning on the eve of India's 1947 independence—he has been "buffeted by too much history." Because of his fateful birthday, Saleem is deeply connected to his country and it has taken its toll. According to Saleem, he must tell his story if he is "to end up meaning—yes, meaning—something." Fearing absurdity above all else, Saleem desperately wants his life to reveal a deeper meaning, or truth, which he hopes to communicate through storytelling.

Although Saleem is the working manager of Braganza Pickles, he claims a rare "mastery of the multiple gifts of cookery and language." He is at once a skilled cook and a talented writer, and he is equally dedicated to both. Saleem states, "My chutneys and kasaundies are, after all, connected to my nocturnal scribblings—by day amongst the pickle-vats, by night within these sheets, I spend my time at the great work of preserving." Saleem preserves pickles and memories for posterity. As Saleem writes his story,

he becomes increasingly sick and weak. Despite his failing health, he refuses to stop writing or even take a break. He claims, "My son will understand. As much as for any living being, I'm telling my story for him, so that afterwards, when I've lost my struggle against the cracks, he will know." As the very first citizen born in a free India, Saleem leads an extraordinary life full of magic and tragedy—but he never verbalizes what his story actually means. For Saleem, the importance of his story is in the telling.

The importance of storytelling is not limited to Saleem but is central to other characters as well. When Saleem tells the story of his grandfather, Aadam Aziz, and his Kashmiri boyhood, he speaks of Tai, the old boatman who makes his living ferrying people and goods across Dal Lake. As a personification of Old India—a time and place untouched by colonialism and Western influence—Tai is inexplicably old. His exact age is unknown, and nobody can remember him ever being young. Tai is a known storyteller, and young Aadam takes his ferry just to listen to his tales. Tai tells Aadam, "It is your history I am keeping my head. Once it was set down in old lost books." He continues, "Even my memory is going now; but I know, although I can't read." When Tai tells his stories, they live on even when they fizzle from his own mind. In this vein, storytelling outlives the confines of memory, age, and even mortal life itself. Tai's stories of Old India aren't written in books and cannot be read—they are ancient oralities which hold great cultural significance. Tai's stories are an integral part of his identity and cannot be forgotten, and these spoken stories are a means to preserve his identity—and to a larger extent, Kashmiri identity as a whole—and to preserve the cultural and historical fabric of India in the years before its independence.

Despite his dedication to storytelling, however, Saleem proves to be an unreliable narrator. Still, Saleem's story is a reflection of his personal truth, and while it may be biased, it is nonetheless valuable. As one of the children of midnight, Saleem is endowed with the supernatural power of telepathy, and he is able to enter the thoughts of others at will. He first discovers his power around the time of the assassination of Mahatma Gandhi, and he writes extensively about Gandhi in his story. Saleem realizes, however, that Gandhi's death occurs on the wrong date in his story. Killed in 1948, Gandhi's death was nearly ten years before Saleem discovers his magical gift, and this revelation leaves Saleem, and the reader, questioning the validity of his amazing story. However, Saleem's story still captures the importance of Gandhi's life and work despite these inconsistencies, suggesting that concrete dates are not important within the broader context of Gandhi's contributions to Indian society.

Saleem soon discovers another chronological error in his storytelling. He writes about his tenth birthday occurring on Election Day in 1957 (a particularly important election that leads to the partition of the state of Bombay); however, like Gandhi's death, Saleem realizes that the election actually took place *before* his birthday. No matter how he tries to remember

correctly, his "memory refuses, stubbornly, to alter the sequence of events." In Saleem's story, the election of 1957 will forever occur on the wrong day because it coincides with the more memorable events of his birthday, again suggesting that concrete dates make little difference within storytelling. Because of these inaccuracies, Saleem questions if his errors "invalidate the entire fabric" of his story. He notes that inconsistencies are everywhere—even the Indian and Pakistani governments cannot agree on certain dates and events occurring during the Indo-Pakistan wars—and he is doubtful of official truth. He refuses to rewrite history just to make it fit his story, claiming "in my India" it happened precisely this way. Through Saleem, Rushdie argues that perception *is* reality, and with this insight he tells an authentic Indian story—one that is not censored by British colonialism, tainted by political corruption, or confined to the limitations of a history book. While his story is chronologically inaccurate and, at times, magical and completely unbelievable, it is nevertheless Saleem's absolute truth.

British Colonialism and Postcolonialism

Born at exactly midnight on the eve of India's independence from British colonialism, Saleem Sinai is the first free native citizen born on Indian soil in nearly a hundred years. After a century of British rule, in addition to a century of unofficial imperialism before that, Saleem's birth marks the end of a two-hundred-year British presence in India. Using their considerable power and influence, the British impose their Western culture and customs onto the Indian people, suppressing and erasing India's own rich culture to such an extent that, even after their official exit, an undeniable Western presence remains. The postcolonial India of Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* underscores the difficulties of navigating a cultural existence that has been largely erased and permanently altered by a foreign, dominant power. Through Saleem, Rushdie creates an entirely new India—one that is both Eastern and Western—in which he is able to find balance between two conflicting cultures.

When Saleem's parents, Ahmed and Amina Sinai, buy William Methwold's mansion, the strange purchase agreement is a small-scale representation of British colonialism. Methwold, a British colonizer who is leaving India after the planned independence on August 15, 1947, agrees to sell Ahmed and Amina one of the mansions on his sprawling estate; however, if they are to buy Methwold's house, they must agree to buy and keep all of the home's contents, and their transaction will not be complete until midnight on August 15. Despite the fact that it is technically Ahmed and Amina's home, they must agree to live among Methwold's belongings, which represent the trappings of Western civilization and culture—and Methwold himself won't officially leave until he is forced to by India's independence. Methwold even insists that Ahmed take a daily cocktail in the garden each evening. "Six o'clock every evening. Cocktail hour. Never varied in twenty years." When Ahmed objects to Methwold's level of involvement in his life, Methwold replies, "A whim, Mr. Sinai…you'll permit a departing colonial his little game? We don't have much left to do,

we British, except play our games." Of course, Ahmed's life is not Methwold's game to play, but he acquiesces because Methwold is willing to sell cheap.

As a result, Methwold imposes his own British customs on Ahmed even after he departs, which symbolically represents the residue of British colonialism left on India after independence. Ahmed and Amina buy Methwold Manner, and they do eventually replace his things with their own; however, Methwold's presence remains in other ways. Saleem notes that many years later, cocktail hour in the garden is still observed, claiming it "a habit too powerful to be broken." Technically, cocktail hour is Methwold's habit, but it is Saleem and his family who are compelled to carry out this customary practice. Methwold has long since returned to Britain, yet he continues to influence how the Sinais live their lives, underscoring the long-term effects of colonialism.

British colonialism is also reflected in Rushdie's representation of "the other" within *Midnight's Children*. The other—generally accepted within the postcolonial milieu as the West's tendency to view anyone or anything not white, Christian, or European as savage and uncivilized—is present in a myriad of ways throughout most of Rushdie's novel. For example, Saleem's mother, Amina, an Indian with a dark complexion, is described as "the blackie" whose own mother is never able to love her because she has "the skin of a South Indian fisherwoman." Amina's mother equates lighter skin—in other words, white skin—with purity and wholesomeness, and she finds it difficult to love her dark-skinned daughter, echoing the color divide and prejudices imposed on India during British colonialism. Furthermore, as Saleem begins communicating telepathically with the other children of midnight born on India's independence, he soon finds that their association is rather weak when the "prejudices and world-views of adults begins to take over their minds." Among other differences, Saleem notes that the "fair-skinned northerners revile Dravidian 'blackies.'" Like Saleem's grandmother, the other Midnight's Children consider light-skinned Indians from the north superior to the dark-skinned Indians of the south, reflecting the widespread prejudices present during colonial times. Similarly, when Evie Burns, a young American girl, moves to Methwold's estate, she immediately declares herself the leader of Saleem and the other children living there. Saleem falls in love with her and marvels at his vulnerability to Europeans, noting that even though Evie is American, it is the "same thing." Evie is a violent bully, and she does not live on the estate for long—her father sends her home to the United States "to get a decent education away from these savages"—but she clearly believes that she is above Saleem and the other children of Methwold Manner. Like a looming colonial power, Evie is "civilized" despite her violent behavior simply because she is from the West, whereas she views the Indian children as "the other" and in dire need of her unsolicited leadership.

In light of this prevailing European influence, Saleem's India is a hybrid mixture of both Eastern and Western cultures and values. For example,

Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz, travels to Germany to study medicine, and after returning to India, he attempts to "fuse the skills of Western and hakimi medicine." Aadam marries modern, Western medicine with the "superstition, mumbo-jumbo and all things magical" of traditional Indian medicine, and manages to save Saleem's life. When Saleem comes down with typhoid fever and Western medicine fails to cure him, Aadam injects him with cobra venom and Saleem makes a full recovery, suggesting that traditional Eastern medicine still has a place in modern practice—and in a modern India. Most importantly, however, Saleem himself is a hybrid. In a moment of anarchy, a hospital worker swaps Saleem just moments after his birth with another baby born to a servant of Methwold Manner. Instead of being the son of two Indian Muslims from Kashmir, Saleem is actually the illegitimate son of William Methwold and a Bombay woman. Like the new India that Saleem personifies, he is not, strictly speaking, entirely Indian; instead, an inescapable British presence is mixed with his eyes "as blue as Kashmiri sky" and his nose "comparable only to the trunk of the elephant-headed god Ganesh." Saleem is at once British *and* Indian, and through this character Rushdie argues that the strength of this new and independent India lies in its diversity.

Sex and Gender

Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children* is a harsh critique of the gender-related power struggles of postcolonial Indian society. After generations of purdah—the belief that Muslim and Hindu women should live separately from society, behind a curtain or veil, to stay out of the sight of men—postcolonial women are encouraged to become "modern Indian women" and remove their veils. Countless years in the domestic sphere has branded them as weak, demure, and dependent on men, and the women of *Midnight's Children* struggle against these traditional gender stereotypes. However, as Saleem Sinai, Rushdie's protagonist, tells the story of India's independence, it is clear that the women wield much of the power, in the domestic sphere and beyond. Rushdie's portrayal of women in *Midnight's Children* dispels the common misconception that women are the "gentler sex."

Despite new freedoms, the women of *Midnight's Children* are still treated like second-class citizens in society. When Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz, is first introduced, he is described as a man with a nose so large it "established incontrovertibly his right to be a patriarch." Noses are often a phallic symbol within Rushdie's novel, and the size of Aadam's is a reflection of his supposedly God-given power over women. Additionally, Mr. Ghani, a blind landowner and Naseem's father, offers his daughter up to Aadam from behind a perforated sheet. Repeatedly claiming that his daughter is sick, Ghani frequently summons Aadam, a local doctor, to their home and forces him to examine her from behind a purdah. Naseem eventually falls in love with the man on the other side of the sheet, but Aadam's initial visits are a ploy by Ghani to marry his daughter off to a doctor. Presumably, Naseem is not given the agency to pursue a man of her

choosing. Furthermore, after Aadam and Naseem are married and she turns into Reverend Mother—an unpleasant and unattractive version of herself in which she rules over her domestic responsibilities with an iron fist—they frequently argue over the best way to raise their family and run their home. When Reverend Mother disagrees with Aadam's firing of their children's religious tutor, she is "dismayed; but it is a father's traditional role, so she could not object." As the patriarch, Aadam assumes complete control of their family and does not allow Reverend Mary to teach the children her religious beliefs. Similarly, when Saleem's mother, Mumtaz, marries Ahmed Sinai, he gives her a new name. As Ahmed's wife, Mumtaz Aziz becomes Amina Sinai, and she has no say in her new identity. Likewise, when Saleem marries Parvati-the-witch, he says, "she took a name which I chose for her out of the repository of my dreams, becoming Laylah." The name Saleem selects for Parvati has meaning in his life, not hers, and when he changes her name, he assumes control of his wife's identity just like his father. As women, neither Mumtaz nor Parvati have agency over their own identities, reflecting the broader maltreatment of women in patriarchal postcolonial India.

Despite this unfair treatment, however, the women of *Midnight's Children* have a considerable amount of power in the domestic sphere and even outside the walls of the home. When Aadam Aziz fires the children's religious tutor and Reverend Mother is denied the right to teach her children her beliefs, she says, "I swear no food will come from my kitchen to your lips! No, not one chapati, until you bring the maulvi sahib back and kiss his, whatsitsname, feet!" Aadam has crossed her, and she boldly makes him pay. She refuses to feed him, and in his own stubbornness, he refuses to eat outside the home as well and nearly dies of starvation. It is only after Reverend Mother pretends to be ill that Aadam finally begins to eat, and from her faux sick bed, it is clear that she has won the argument. Aadam again crosses his wife when he allows Nadir Khan, the private secretary of a pro-Indian Muslim politician, to hide in their basement after his employer is assassinated. When Reverend Mother objects to their secret guest, Aadam orders her, "Be silent, woman!" Reverend Mother responds with three years of literal silence, claiming, "Very well. You ask me, whatsitsname, for silence. So not one word, whatsitsname, will pass my lips from now on." In a power display of her own, Reverend Mother refuses to speak.

In another display of power, when Ahmed Sinai's failed business attempt leaves all of his assets frozen and his family broke, a very pregnant Amina sneaks off to the race track and gambles for extra money. While her husband sinks deeper into alcoholism and depression, Amina "fights her husband's fight" and keeps her family afloat, dismantling the idea that a man has to be the head of the household. What's more, at the climax of the story, it is a woman, Indira Gandhi (the corrupt Prime Minister of India whom Saleem refers to as the Widow), who declares a public emergency in an effort to destroy the Midnight Children's Conference—the 1,001 children born with supernatural powers on the eve of India's independence who serve as the metaphorical mirror of the nation—by hunting down each member and

sterilizing them in a sinister attempt to control India's overpopulation. While most members are given forced vasectomies or tubal ligations, Saleem, the most powerful of the conference and therefore the most dangerous, is castrated by the Widow to ensure complete and irreversible sterility. Indira Gandhi's power is unmatched throughout the novel.

Ultimately, Saleem is emasculated by a powerful woman; yet he is strangely accepting of his sterility. Sexual impotence reoccurs throughout the story, and it seems to matter very little to those it affects, suggesting that sex is not necessarily the most important part of a relationship as far as women, the most powerful, are concerned. After all, Amina spends her life loving an impotent Nadir Khan, and it is only Reverend Mother who openly objects to their sexless marriage. Amina is willing to overlook Nadir's impotence, but Reverend Mother's tradition dictates otherwise. Similarly, Padma, Saleem's companion and audience for the writing of his story, is also accepting of Saleem's impotence. He refers to his sterility in an almost humorous way, speaking of Padma's attempts to "resuscitate his other pencil," but she nevertheless loves him and intends to marry him. Ultimately, the Widow's power does not lie solely in her ability to emasculate Saleem, it lies with her ability to completely destroy his life. According to Saleem, "women have made me; and also unmade. From Reverend Mother to the Widow, and even beyond, I have been at the mercy of the so-called (erroneously, in my opinion!) gentler sex." He speaks of a great "cosmic energy, which is represented as the female organ" and Mother India who "there is no escape from." Despite blatant sexism, the women of *Midnight's Children* rule Saleem's world.

Identity and Nationality

From the moment Saleem Sinai is born on the eve of India's independence from Great Britain, he becomes the living embodiment of his country. Saleem *is* India, and his identity metaphorically represents the identity of an entire nation; however, Saleem's identity is complicated and conflicted. A nation, generally understood as the same people living in the same place, only loosely applies to India's diverse population. Instead, multiple religions, languages, and political beliefs divide postcolonial India into a nation of very different people living in the same place, making one unifying national identity virtually impossible. Saleem—and by proxy, the country he represents—is one of many characters within *Midnight's Children* struggling with a conflicted identity, through which Rushdie ultimately argues against the creation of a single unifying national identity for the newly independent India.

In *Midnight's Children*, several of Rushdie's characters undergo a crisis of identity, suggesting that personal identity—and, on a larger scale, national identity—is multifaceted and can't be neatly shelved as one thing. For example, early in the novel, before Saleem is born and India is free, Mahatma Gandhi declares a hartal, an official moment of silence to mourn the continued presence of the British in India. Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz, a Kashmiri Muslim living in Amristar, "is not sure if the hartal […]

is his fight, even though he is in occupied territory." Aadam believes "Kashmiris are different," despite also being Indian. Because of this, Aadam feels out of place mourning with his fellow Indians. Similarly, when Saleem's mother, Mumtaz Aziz, must divorce her first husband because he is unable to father children, she marries Ahmed Sinai and changes her name. Ahmed says, "Time for a fresh start. Throw Mumtaz and her Nadir Khan out of the window, I'll choose your new name. Amina. Amina Sinai: you'd like that?" Mumtaz accepts her new identity as Amina, but she is never able to stop loving Nadir, and her new name never reflects her true identity. Additionally, Saleem's sister, the Brass Monkey, transitions through several identities. She begins simply as Saleem's feisty little sister, a precocious young girl known to start things on fire. The Monkey, just like her Catholic ayah, or nanny, has a penchant for scripture and leavened bread; however, after her family moves to Pakistan, she changes her name to Jamila Singer, and wearing a white silk chadar "heavily embroidered in gold brocade-work and religious calligraphy," she sings to a Muslim nation and becomes "Pakistan's Angel." Her identity as Jamila is short-lived, however, and in the chaos of the Indo-Pakistan War, she sneaks off and joins a convent, dedicating the remainder of her life to Christianity. Despite changing her identity, the Brass Monkey cannot resist the pull of her true calling.

Saleem likewise goes through a series of identity crises, which is reflective of his own complex identity. After a minor accident leaves a ten-year-old Saleem hospitalized, blood tests reveal that he is not actually his parents' biological son. Saleem learns that his ayah, Mary Pereira, in "her own private revolutionary act," switched infant Saleem with infant Shiva, another baby born on independence eve at the same time as Saleem to a poor couple working near the Sinais' home. Saleem's identity is further complicated when Shiva's own father turns out not to be Wee Willie Winkie, a poor accordionist, but William Methwold, the British colonizer who owns the estate where the Sinais live. Willie's wife, Vanita, has a secret affair with Methwold, and when she dies shortly after giving birth, she takes their secret with her. Ultimately, Saleem's parents accept him as their son and it "makes no difference" to any of them; however, as a one of Midnight's Children, Saleem must reconcile being the "mirror of India" with the reality of his half-British parentage. Lastly, when Saleem is living in Pakistan with his family, he is hit in the head in an air-raid (which subsequently kills most of his family) during the Indo-Pakistan war. Saleem "suffers a merely partial erasure" and forgets his name—and his moral compass. Fighting against India on behalf of the Pakistanis, Saleem is essentially fighting himself, and he makes this treason possible by hiding behind his amnesia. Saleem does eventually regain his memory and his true identity, but Rushdie makes a powerful point in the process. The very people who are so violently fighting each other because of their differences were, not terribly long ago, considered one and the same.

Saleem's identity is multifaceted, and he cannot claim one part of it over the other. He states, "Despite my Muslim background, I'm enough of a

Bombayite to be well up in Hindu stories, and actually I'm very fond of the image of trunk-nosed, flap-eared Ganesh." Rushdie's comparison of identity to nationality is perhaps best represented in the character of Aadam Aziz, who, after hitting his nose on the ground during his morning prayers, resolves "never again to kiss earth for any god or man." Instead of religion, Aadam equates his identity with his Kashmiri homeland, the northern-most part of the subcontinent of India. In a reflection of Aadam's own ambivalence, Kashmir, a territory with a largely Muslim population, is led by Hari Singh, a devout Hindu, and it remains disputed territory under the partitioning of India. Like Saleem, and much of his family, Kashmir does not fit neatly into either India or Pakistan. With these conflicts in identity, Rushdie implies that the single most unifying aspect of Indian identity is their differences, and because of this, traditional concepts of national identity do not apply. Instead, Rushdie advocates for Indians to find common ground in the very thing that divides them.

Fragments and Partitioning

Following their 1947 independence from British rule, India begins to break up in a process known as partitioning. British India splits along religious lines, forming the Muslim nation of Pakistan and the secular, but mostly Hindu, nation of India. India continues to fracture even further, dividing itself based on language and class. Meanwhile, Saleem Sinai, the living embodiment of India, is also cracking—and dying. Saleem, born at the exact moment of independence, is inescapably linked to his country, and they are destined to the same fate. India's partitioning plagues Saleem's physical existence, and it is likewise reflected in his family life. Both Saleem's grandfather and his mother attempt to love fragments of another, trying in vain to piece together their desired lives. Like Saleem's country, these attempts at partitioning lead to destruction and despair. Throughout the novel, Rushdie juxtaposes the private partitioning of Saleem's family against the public partitioning of the newly independent India to argue against the partitioning of India. Instead, Rushdie implies that all things—countries and people alike—must be appreciated as a whole.

Fragments and partitioning are first referenced when Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz, falls in love with Naseem Ghani through a perforated sheet. Since Aadam falls in love with a fragment of Naseem—what he knows of her through the sheet, rather than her whole self—the relationship is doomed to fail. As a young doctor living in Kashmir, Aadam is summoned to the home of Mr. Ghani, a blind landowner, when his daughter, Naseem, falls ill. A devout Muslim, Ghani refuses to let Naseem be seen by Aadam, stating, "She does not flaunt her body under the noses of strange men." Since Aadam is not "permitted to see her, no, not in any circumstances," he is required to examine his patient through a seven inch hole in a perforated sheet, piecing together his diagnosis. Naseem soon begins to experience new ailments weekly, and her father summons Aadam with each complaint. Moving the sheet from body part to body part, Naseem is "glued together by [Aadam's] imagination," until the "phantasm of a

partitioned woman begins to haunt him." Although three years pass before Naseem complains of a headache and Aadam is able to see her face, he falls in love with each individual piece of her. Aadam and Naseem are eventually married, and they remain together for the rest of their lives; however, their relationship is difficult and strained. Naseem becomes known only as Reverend Mother, and she rules over her family like a tyrant. She imposes silence and fasting at will, and she becomes "prematurely old." Aadam and Reverend Mother's sex life is a disaster, and it is clear that they are not compatible. He "had made the mistake of loving her in fragments," and as a whole, Aadam finds loving Reverend Mother exceedingly difficult.

Rushdie further argues against partitioning when Saleem's mother, Mumtaz Aziz, resolves—and fails—to love her second husband, Ahmed Sinai, "bit by bit." Mumtaz is forced to divorce her first husband, Nadir Khan, when it is discovered that he is impotent. Mumtaz and Nadir happily live with their secret for two years; however, when Reverend Mother finds out, Nadir leaves his beloved Mumtaz, formally declaring "I divorce three" three times, as dictated by Muslim custom. Mumtaz's divorce leaves her broken, and she continues to love Nadir even in his absence. Mumtaz soon marries Ahmed Sinai and changes her name to Amina. While she is still in love with Nadir, Ahmed is able to give her what Nadir can't. Amina's culture dictates a traditional family, and Ahmed may be her only chance for children. Amina dreams of Nadir and wakes each morning "with an unspeakable name on her lips," but she vows to *try* to love Ahmed. She selects "one fragment" of Ahmed each day, concentrating "her entire being upon it until it becomes wholly familiar." In this way, Amina slowly begins to love Ahmed Sinai. However, despite her greatest effort, "there was one part of [Ahmed] which she never managed to love." Because of her undying love for Nadir, Amina resents the one thing that Ahmed possesses "in full working order, which Nadir Khan certainly lacked." Amina detests sex with Ahmed, and this causes considerable dissent in their marriage. Ultimately unhappy, she slowly turns Ahmed into a makeshift Nadir—feeding him until he gains weight and encouraging him to grow his hair differently so that he physically resembles him—yet she remains unable to fully love Ahmed. Amina "fell under the spell of the perforated sheet of her own parents," and she is likewise unsuccessful in love.

Ultimately, the book's private family tensions reflect national ones; just as partitioning doesn't work in the characters' individual lives, Rushdie argues that Partition won't work for India. Following the initial split of India and Pakistan, India is "divided anew, into fourteen states and six centrally-administered territories." Language, not geography, divides the states, and the aggressive protests of "language marchers" demanding partition means that "schools are often shut, because of the danger of violence on the bus-routes." As this small-scale partitioning unfolds, Pakistan and India continue to dispute the boundaries drawn during their own partition, leading to extensive violence and large-scale wars. Even the Midnight Children's Conference—Saleem and the other children born on India's independence who are a metaphorical "mirror of the nation"—are divided by imaginary

lines based on race, religion, gender, and class, and they are ultimately unable to overcome their differences. The subcontinent is "split like an amoeba," and Saleem is "disintegrating" as his country divides itself. With Saleem's impending death, Rushdie implies that a partitioned India cannot be peacefully sustained.

Religion

Religion is at the forefront of Salman Rushdie's *Midnight's Children*, and it drives most of the narrative throughout the entire novel. Saleem Sinai, the narrator-protagonist, is born Muslim but lives most of his life in the Hindu-steeped culture of Bombay. His lifelong ayah, Mary Pereira, is a devout Catholic, and his sister, the Brass Monkey, ultimately joins a nunnery. In the religiously pluralistic backdrop of postcolonial India, Rushdie references several religions—including Sikhism, Buddhism, and Judaism—but he focuses mainly on Islam, Christianity, and Hinduism. Despite being surrounded by religion, Saleem is not a practicing Muslim, and he never visits a mosque or worships in any other way; however, Saleem is never able to fully escape religion, and as his story unfolds, it is a major cause of the civil unrest following India's independence. Suppressed under British rule, freedom of religion is a fundamental right under India's new constitution, and it has saturated society. *Midnight's Children* is centered on the dichotomy of the religious and secular within Indian society, as well as the tension between majority and minority religions present within the subcontinent as a whole. With Saleem's story, Rushdie argues that religion affects all lives, devout practitioner and staunch atheist alike, and if left unchecked, it can become very dangerous.

Midnight's Children begins as Saleem's grandfather, Aadam Aziz, abandons his Muslim faith. Aadam "hits his nose against a frost-hardened tussock of earth while attempting to pray." Three drops of blood fall from his nose and he vows "never again to kiss earth for any god or man." Aadam's character, despite turning his back on his religion, carries heavy religious connotations. His name is a nod to creationism and references Adam and Eve of the Hebrew Bible and Christian Old Testament (or Adam and Hawwa in the Quran), and his bloody nose serves the same purpose—according to the Quran, man was created from clots of blood. Aadam repeatedly states throughout the novel that he is "not much of a Muslim," despite marrying the deeply religious Reverend Mother. Aadam does not equate religion with morality as his wife does, and because of this, their marriage is quite difficult. Reverend Mother insists on religious education for their children, but Aadam goes behind her back and fires the tutor, claiming, "He was teaching them to hate, wife. He tells them to hate Hindus and Buddhists and Jains and Sikhs and who knows what other vegetarians. Will you have hateful children, woman?" Aadam views the religious teachings as intolerant and dangerous for his children. After India's independence and the creation of Pakistan, Aadam refuses to move to the new Muslim country despite his wife's insistence, "because that was a country built especially for God." Aadam avoids religion to the best of his

ability for his entire life, but when he grows old and senile, he "disgraces" himself "by stumbling into mosques and temples with his old man's stick, mouthing imprecations and lashing out at any worshipper or holy man within range." Aadam is resentful of religion and the violence it has brought into his life, and in his religious avoidance, he personifies the newly independent and (supposedly) secular India.

Religion is painted in a negative light throughout most of the novel. Saleem's ayah, Mary, serves as the personification of Catholicism, and she pines for Joseph D'Costa, a wanted fugitive and communist anarchist. Their names, of course, carry biblical connotations, and Mary relies heavily on her faith; however, her love for Joseph drives her to switch Baby Saleem with Baby Shiva on the night of India's independence (a private revolutionary act, switching rich for poor) and she avoids church and confession for the rest of her life on account of her guilt and sin. Despite Mary's pious and giving nature, her crime taints her character—and by proxy, her religion. Similarly, when Saleem's father, Ahmed Sinai, enters into a new business with Suresh Narlikar, a Bombay gynecologist and businessman, and the business fails, Narlikar blames religion. Ahmed is left broke with his assets frozen by the Indian government. Narlikar claims, "These are bad times, Sinai bhai—freeze a Muslim's assets, the say, and you make him run to Pakistan, leaving all his wealth behind him. Catch the lizard's tail and he'll snap it off! This so-called secular state gets some damn clever ideas." Narlikar and Ahmed believe that their business failed because they are Muslim—and the Indian government would prefer that they moved to Pakistan where they belong. Furthermore, when Saleem and his family do move to Pakistan, they find that the Pakistanis feel similarly about India. Saleem's uncle and high-ranking member of the Pakistani military, General Zulfikar, frequently yells to his family, "Let's get organized!" as a way of rallying them like troops. He states, "Let's give those Hindus something to worry! We'll blow their invaders into so many pieces, there'll be no damn thing left to reincarnate." General Zulfikar is not tolerant of the Hindu religion and he does not want any of them in Pakistan. He even mocks their beliefs when he claims there will be nothing left to reincarnate after he blows them up.

Saleem's story underscores the duality of the secular and religious within postcolonial Indian society. Even though it is technically a secular state, religion has infiltrated society to a considerable extent, and reasonably so. After all, Saleem claims to live "in a country whose population of deities rivals the numbers of its people." Like his grandfather, Saleem "fails to either believe or disbelieve in God," yet his "head is full of all sorts of religions." He even thinks that the voices he hears (which are actually his telepathic powers and his direct line to the other children born during the midnight hour on independence eve) are the voices of Archangels. Of course, his parents think he is insane, and he is punished when Mary accuses him of blasphemy, but religion is, in some way, always a major part of Saleem's life. *Midnight's Children* is Rushdie's attempt to balance the secular and the religious in postcolonial India, and while Saleem's story

does not inspire much optimism regarding religious peace, Rushdie does offer some hope. Knowledge is essential to religious tolerance, and *Midnight's Children* is certainly an education.

9.2 TRAITS OF MAGIC REALISM IN THE NOVEL:

"Magic realism", a term first coined by Franz Roh and used in the title of his book "Nachexpressionismus, magischer Realismus: Probleme derneuesten eruopaishcher Maleri (1925). He was concerned with the characteristic and tendencies discernible in the work of certain German painter of his contemporary period, especially the artists of Munich, because their themes were often imaginary, somewhat outlandish and fantastic and with a certain dream-like quality. Later the term came to be associated with certain kinds of fiction. The term drew much attention on literary circles and chiefly used by the literary critics.

By the end of the 1980s, the term became a well-established 'label' for some forms of fiction and for few writers such as Luis Borges (1899-1988), the Argentinean writer who authored Historia universal de la infamia, widely acclaimed by many as the first work of magic realism; Gabriel Garcia Marquez is also a notable exponent of this kind of fiction, especially his novel "One Hundred Years of Solitude"; Alejo Carpentier is another described as a 'magic realist'. Other writers such as Italo Calvino, John Fowles, Gunter Grass, Emma Tennant, Angela carter, and Salman Rushdie.

The common traits of Magic realism is, they chiefly have a strong and imagination inducing narrative style that will inculcate the reality with the unforeseen and incomprehensible that comprises the elements of stargaze, fantasy, fairy tales or mythology and blending it with the mundane reality, often in a kaleidoscopical envision of the author. The unfeigned reason for blending magical elements into a realistic atmosphere in order to decipher the verity of the reality and to differentiate the difference between the real and fantasy.

The amalgamation of the illusion and the realism is an important aspect of magical realism. Right from the beginning of the novel, the passage which deals with Saleem's grandfather in Kashmir is a wonderful example of blending the magical and the real elements. In one spring of 1915, Saleem's grandfather Aadam Aziz hits the ground while praying and three drops of blood fall from his nose and turn into rubies; his tears become solid like diamonds. In a magical realist text, we find the conflict between the world of fantasy and the reality, and each world works for creating a fictional world from the other; in Midnight's Children through the magical, the realistic creates its voice and makes its voice and makes it heard. Rushdie has used magical realist elements by mixing the real and the fantastic, twisting time, and by including myth and folklore. His magic realism has its origin more in the inner and psychological worlds, inner conflicts, moment of uncertainty, the style of storytelling of the unreliable narrator, and less in the beliefs, rituals and illusions of people as a whole.

Another appearance of magical realism in the novel is the character of Tai, the boatman, particularly, Tai's claim to being of great antiquity. He claims himself so old that he has "watched the mountains being born" and "seen emperors die" (Rushdie 2006, p13); he also say that he "saw that Isa, that Christ, when he came to Kashmir" (p.13). The reason why Rushdie had shown such impossible longevity of Tai is that he wanted Tai to represent old and precolonial India. Milan Abdullah, a political figure before independence, has the strange trait of humming without any interruption, which has sharp and high pitch and which causes a certain effects on people surrounding him. In one incident, his humming causes the glass windows of the room fall down. Later in the story, we also came across the fantastical events like the 1001 midnight's children with various magical gifts; Tai Bibi, the demimondaine who claims to be 512 years old and she can assume the body odor of any person is not something we can see in real life. Saleem's mother's fear of getting a baby who will have cauliflower in its head instead of brain; Saleem's telepathic power and later his ability to smell emotions, which stemmed from his grandfather Adam, who also had the same large and magical nose. Because of this magical nose he was saved from getting killed in Jallianwala Bagh Massacre.

Saleem has to contend with his personal trajectory. His family is active in this, as they begin a number of migrations and endure the numerous wars which plague the subcontinent. During this period he also suffers from amnesia until he enters a quasi-mythological exile in the jungle of Sundarbans, where he is re-endowed with his memory. In doing so, he reconnects with his childhood friends. Saleem later becomes involved with the Emergency declared by Indira Gandhi and her son Sanjay's „cleansing" of the Jama Masjid slum. For a time Saleem is held as a political prisoner; these passages contain scathing criticisms of Indira Gandhi's overreach during the Emergency as well as what Rushdie seems to see as a personal lust for power bordering on godhood. The Emergency signals the end of the potency of the Midnight's Children, and there is little left for Saleem to do but pick up the few pieces of his life he may still find and write the chronicle that encompasses both his personal history and that of his still-young nation; a chronicle written for his son, who, like his father, is both chained and supernaturally endowed by history.

Saleem uses magical realism, with its blending of mythology, realism, fantastic elements, and history, to tell hi(s)tory, and this remains the most effective way for him to continue his story and to express his position as a postcolonial Indian citizen. Magic and references to ancient myth control and structure the narrative but instead of fossilizing it in past they are well-established in the contemporary history. Rushdie used fantasy as a method of producing intensified images of reality. He uses this intensified images of reality' in it to portray the happenings preceding and flowing India's independence. The desperate materials pertaining to those times of political upheaval, popular upsurge, growing optimism, and chaotic developments that often bordered on the fantastic could not have been woven together by any other method but that of fantasy.

Rushdie uses the technique of magical realism to solve the problems of postcoloniality because people would like to create their identities, histories, stories, beliefs, customs and tradition, and to share it with other people. The novel focuses on Saleem's personal and familial events and by doing so it actually discovers Indian historical events; Saleem's birth and death and in between perpendicularly comparing it with India, in various aspects suvh as social, cultural, political and religious differences. The novel makes the historical events less powerful and put it in background by emphasizing personal and familial events, and also by using humor. The novel portrays the anarchy of the British power over India and Indians, Indians' sense of identity through independence, and the consequences of this long desired independence. The novel also shows how the postcolonial people invent their own historical narrative by getting away from colonial narratives. They do it by emphasizing personal and familial histories and by using humor in depicting these histories.

Metaphor, the most used traits of magic realist fiction, takes this novel to a greater heights. On the whole this novel can interpret and read as an allegory of the history of India. The entire evolves and revolves around Saleem Sinai, who believes that because he was born on the stroke of midnight of August 15th, 1947, which is exactly when Indian gained independence, his story and that of India are inextricably linked. Thus Saleem believes that events in his life, whether or not created by Saleem himself, are always entangled with the web of events that took place in the nation of India.

The novel is based on metaphorical meaning: the allegory of Saleem-as-India is what the novel revolves around. Nevertheless, Rushdie makes sure to also destabilize that form of knowledge, to refrain from claiming authority for metaphorical meaning. Rushdie's novel, above all, questions everything in order to make sure nothing gains total authority, and nothing is deemed more important than anything else. The magic realist adaptation of traditional (hi)stories is used in Midnight's Children to criticize any claim of total authority or absolute truth.

Magic realism uses traditional storytelling as an important and useful tool in expressing opinions or transferring knowledge via literature, which is significant because in the indigenous cultures of storytelling had a great importance. Magic realism is also used to undermine the important status of historical narrative. Midnight's Children, which has constructed an alternative version of an important historical narrative unveils the fabricated nature of such narrative. Although Western historiography is intended to portray factual truth, its narrative is, of course, always constructed which would make its reliance on truth doubtful from a Western point of view.

Saleem uses magical realism, with its blending of mythology, realism, fantastic elements, and history, to tell his story, and this remains the most effective way for him to continue his story and to express his position as a postcolonial Indian citizen. Magic and references to ancient myth control and structure the narrative but instead of fossilizing it in past they are well-established in the contemporary history. The novel's major themes, the

creation and telling of history, identity and stories arise through the structured hybridity of magical realism and without magical realism it would be extremely difficult to connect these free themes, along with the discussion of the problems of post-coloniality. Midnight's Children uses the technique of magical realism to solve the problems of post-coloniality because people would like to create their own identities, histories, stories, beliefs, customs, and tradition, and to share them with others. The novel focuses on Saleem's personal and familial events and by doing so it actually discovers Indian historical events; Saleem's birth, growth, development, and destruction are India's. The midnight's children conference, in many ways, reflects the issues the newly independent India faced regarding the social, cultural, political and religious differences. The novel makes the historical events less powerful and put it in background by emphasizing personal and familial events, and also by using humor. By putting aside these historical events, the novel wrestles with British power over India, Indians' sense of identity through independence, and the consequences of this long desired independence. The novel also shows how the postcolonial people invent their own historical narrative by getting away from colonial narratives. They do it by emphasizing personal and familial histories and by using humor in depicting these histories.

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10

CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF BANDHUMADHAV'S 'THE POISONED BREAD' AND KESHAV MESHRAM'S 'THE BARRIERS'

Unit Structure:

10.0 Objectives
10.1 About Bandhu Madhav
10.2 Summary of 'The Poisoned Bread'
10.3 Dalit Oppression
10.4 Hegemony
10.5 Impact of Education
10.6 Conclusion
10.7 Let's Sum up
10.8 Important Questions
10.9 About Keshav Meshram
10.10 Analysis of 'The Barrier'
10.11 Conclusion
10.12 Important Questions
10.13 References

10.0 OBJECTIVES

- To introduce students to Indian Fiction in English from 1980 onwards
- To enable students to read texts in line with modern critical approaches
- To familiarize students with different concepts and movements associated with Modern Indian Fiction.

With this knowledge the students will be equipped with comprehensive understanding of Indian Fiction in English from 1980 onwards. Students will acquire the discipline to become reflective and imaginative thinkers through a close, critical and analytical reading of the prescribed texts.

10.1 ABOUT BANDHU MADHAV

Bandhu Madhav was a Marathi Dalit writer. He belonged to the Mahar community. Bandhu Madhav wrote prominently and seemingly in the 50s and 60s. Conducive to, raise awareness and understanding among the scheduled caste, he wrote in the weekly which was started by the leader of the Dalits, Babasaheb Ambedkar 'Janata' and also in 'Prabuddha Bharat'. Through the medium of arts, and through the medium of stories and novels, he did an efficient and powerful job of awakening the Dalit people to their sufferings, plight and pain. Bandhu Madhav's writing are read widely since last three decades and most of the stories which he wrote are located in rural settings such as on the banks of the Krishna River, villages from Sangli and Kolhapur etc. Bandhu Madhav stories are chiefly and largely based and developed in these two districts. For instance, places like Pedgaon, Bangaon, Kavalapur, Vadinge, and Buddhgaon, among others. Even at present, reading Bandhu Madhav's stories exhibits the images, customs, duties, traditions, and lives of human nature before our very eyes. And we can perceive how it resonates with the contemporary situation to a great extent. Bandhu Madhav is among such writes who deeply, profoundly and intensely write about his experiences, sufferings and pain during his childhood spent with his parents, grandparents, and uncles. For his writings that were contemplated forceful, powerful and socially useful, Mumbai's Maharashtra Dalit Literature association felicitated him in 1956.

10.2 SUMMARY OF 'THE POISONED BREAD'

The story 'The Poisoned Bread' by Bandhu Madhav was published as a part of an anthology of Dalit literature titled poisoned bread. The short story by the Marathi Dalit writer indicates and calls attention to the situations and conditions of the Dalits without land, sustenance and livelihood. This serious problem of the Dalits needs to be addressed so as to help the Dalits emerge and arise from their pathetic and miserable situation as well as experience, to equality freedom and development.

The short story by notable writer Bandhu Madhav, is basically a flashback of when as a small boy, 12 years back, the narrator visits his village and accompanies his grandfather to Bapu Patil, who is a village landowner conducive to, work for him and plead for a large share of the crop. However, his hope and expectations are not met because of the fact that the fight and conflict in the story emerges with the narrators, belligerent and aggressive reply to Bapu Patil. The narrator of the story symbolizes the new force and voice of the new generation, that is more awake, knowledgeable and aware of its own self-respect, grandeur and dignity. The duo of the grandfather and the grandson work for the whole day tilling the soil, but in return Patil does not pay them anything not even the food to eat after doing so much labour and hardship. Hence, due to hunger, the grandfather collects the smelly and stale rancid bread crumbs lying near the pen which the cow had refused to eat. As a result, after eating the bread, the grandfather then falls

sick due to food poisoned caused by the stale rancid crumbs of bread and dies. The hungry grandfather succumbed to his health and died.

Before the grandfather dies, he tells the narrator that never depend on the age-old bread which is associated with their caste. Further, he tells the narrator to get as much education as he can so that he can never depend on others. The grandfather also tells him that if this poisonous bread is not taken away from them, then it will not only kill him but the entire Dalit community to which they belong. The bread which the grandfather referred to was the Indian society and the caste system that forced them into enslavement, slavery and servitude.

The plight, dilemma and hardship of the Dalits is exhibited in various ways in the story by the Marathi Dalit writer Bandhu Madhav. The constant, humility, humbleness and modesty thy must show, the denial and rejection of food, the begging and pleading they must do to gain the basic and the minimal, and the child's constant questioning of the Dalit state. The death of the father was because of the problems and issues caused by the rigid caste system that sees the Dalits as an outcaste, an untouchable.

Even as a child, the narrator questions the Dalit's plight, sorrows and sufferings, showing the new spirit of the knowledgeable, well-informed and the enlightened, the Dalit. He further questions Babu Patil as to why they have been created if they were such a trouble and problem, and why their religion can't abide and endure them and who is their God. He then also asks if the Dalits are to be treated like footwear and since they are born the same way every human is born, shouldn't they be treated the same. Hence, through questions like these, the Marathi Dalit writer Bandhu Madhav questions the treatment that is meted out towards the Dalits in not just the Indian society but in India, and therefore, ask for their uplift.

10.3 DALIT OPPRESSION

Dalit suppression, oppression and exploitation is the micro and macro-level implications and impact of the caste system in Indian society. Bandhu Madhav in his short story 'The Poisoned Bread' has portrayed and illustrated the psychological servitude, slavery and enslavement of the Mahar community. The Dalit narrative has developed from the 'poisoned bread' since it is intimately associated and related with the low caste people, the untouchables, who have been marginalized and demeaned from the social, economic, and political mainstream. The poignant and woeful manner in which Yetalya, the grandfather, is treated by Bapu Patil is a reflection of how the Dalits, in general, were being treated in the Indian society, but throughout India. The grandfather pleads and request for work in hope of receiving something to eat in return which exhibits their painful, sorrowful, pitiful and miserable conditions where they yearned and crave for nothing but just food. Both the grandfather and the grandson are made to work in the field all day in the promise of some corn if they finish the work properly and on time. However, Bapu Patil picks up a quarrel with the grandson, who is an educated young man and he does not see it fit and appropriate that they should be treated so badly and lowly by the upper

class. Hence, as a consequence of this quarrel, Bapu Patil does not provide them with food. This shows the height and intensity of the oppression inflicted and imposed upon the Dalits where they are denied and refused food in return for their day's hardship and toil.

The upper caste zamindars made the Mahars and other Dalit communities work in their fields, and even after working and finishing the work on time, they provided them with little or no grains for their necessities, livelihood and sustenance which eventually forced the Dalits to forever remain in debt to the zamindars. Hence, the Mahars and the other Dalit communities could not revolt and rebel against this oppression, suppression and domination, for the fact that it would deprive and bereave them of their very basic need, food. Not only from depriving food, but the upper class took advantage of this very weakness of the Dalits and enslaved them and treated them even worse than animals, which is also being delineated by Bandhu Madhav in 'The Poisoned Bread'.

The grandfather, despite the fact, working and finishing the work on time, when being denied food, walks to the cowshed and picks up two pieces of bread that were rejected by the cow, which had molds and urine on them. He cleans them with his hands and as he was very hungry, so out of hunger, eats them. Hence, after eating that poisoned bread, the grandfather dies and while it might seem a little embroidered and exaggerated, but in reality, that was the actual condition, sufferings, pain and hardships of the Dalits.

The grandfather in Bandhu Madhav's story 'The Poisoned Bread' is only a representation of the true domination, oppression, hardship and injustice that the Dalits bear and endure in the hands of the upper class. The prospects of the Dalits without land and livelihood are a long-drawn-out condition. This major problem needs to be spoken out and solve out to help and support the Dalits emerge from the oppression and domination.

10.4 HEGEMONY

The book 'The Poisoned Bread' by Bandhu Madhav got an overwhelming and astonishing reaction, and it also got converted into Indian language just as unknown dialects, making a dynamic abstract development. The short story by Marathi Dalit writer Bandhu Madhav scrutinizes the brain of somebody abused, tortured and mistreated intellectually and yet unequipped and incapable for hitting back.

The vast majority of the compositions in The Poisoned Bread have a place with a similar type where shock, trauma, irritability, despair, sorrow, misery and hopelessness lead to revolts and insurgency pointed toward achieving a more equivalent social request. The voice of the marginalized in Dalit writing makes it on a standard with unbelievable and unimaginable scholarly work in any language, public or global. The Poisoned Bread by Bandhu Madhav, for achievement for Dalit writing just as for Dalit developments regardless of whether the next generation decides to utilize various strategies to convey, forwards the battle and combat for an impartial and unprejudiced Indian culture.

10.5. IMPACT OF EDUCATION

Education is so powerful that it can bring a major and significant impact on the mindset and perspective of the people. Rajaram Mohan Roy, the well-known Indian social reformer of pre-independent India and also one of the founders of the Brhamo Sabha in 1828, emboldened education and the development of knowledge with a viewpoint that, it can enable and permit the common people to realize and become aware of the effect of the social evils and ills on their lives and to retaliate against the so upper class who promote and practice these discriminatory and inequitable methods on the lower caste community.

In Bandhu Madhav's short story 'The Poisoned Bread', the reader is unveiled and disclosed to the two sides of the Dalit community by depicting two major characters, one, being the grandfather, Yetalya, and the other is the grandson. The grandfather in the story seems to be compliant and submissive, and accepting his fate of being a Mahar (a Dalit caste, who were seen as the lowest cast in the Hindu social system). He addresses elder brother Bapu Patil as Anna and asserts that he is a slave of Bapu Patil. When Bapu Patil insolently mocks Yetalya asserting that the Mahars and Mangs have started claiming equal status as the high born, the same caste like the Hindus, who says they are not same like us, and blame the protest of the lower class as the reason for rains failing that year, for the reason that, they had abandoned and relinquished their caste and gone against the religion, Yetalya hearing this statement responds that, he isn't one of them who claims equal status for the upper class and lower class. Nevertheless, the grandson who observes and notices the conversation is infuriated by the way Patil mocks and insults his grandfather not just one but multiple times. He then retaliates and questions Patil as to what religion cannot tolerate one man treating another man as a human being and what was the need of such an intolerant religion. Outraged and furious by this counter questioning, Patil warns the boy that education would not make a Mahar, the low caste, equal to an upper caste and he asks, "A chappal is never worshipped in the place of God, is it?", which indirectly indicates that the Dalits were only fit to be treated as low as the chappal (footwear).

We see by the end of the story, the grandson educates his grandfather on the significance of retaliating against such evils, abuse and mistreatment. The grandson further asserts that, "But why should it go on? Even a lion locked in a cage all his life forgets how to hunt." The grandfather who seems to comprehend the essence and importance of what his grandson is talking about asks him how do they go about this protest which would eventually affect and disturb their livelihood for the reason that, they are dependent on the zamindar for their daily share of corn. Therefore, after listening this the grandson further responds that the protest needs to be gradual and they could start by not pretending that the small, inadequate and insufficient share of corn that they receive at the end of the day after working hard at the field the whole day, as an act of mercy and pity from the zamindar's side. It is something that they rightfully and befittingly deserve for the day's hard work. Hence, this change of mindset that we see is nothing but the

impact that education can bring, which has the potential and possibility of igniting a major change for the good of society. Hence, in Bandhu Madhav's story 'The Poisoned Bread', the grandson is well-informed and aware of the existing social ills and evils and therefore, takes a stand against those ills and evils and acts to revolt against the injustice, abuse and mistreatment of the Dalits.

10.6. CONCLUSION

'The Poisoned Bread' exhibits the social evils, slavery and discrimination that the Dalits had to deal with and how education was an eye-opener and a way out for the Dalits. 'The Poisoned Bread' magnificently depicts the oppression, suppression and exploitation of the Dalits and how hegemony has its claws delve deep into the lives of the marginalized section. Bandhu Madhav, the Marathi Dalit writer from the Mahar community through 'The Poisoned Bread', indicates that education could be a chief and leading game-changer for the disadvantaged and the marginalized. Right education with good motive and objective, grasp the power to bring about a major and considerable shift in the way that society works. Bandhu Madhav accentuates the significance of education for the reason that it can enlighten and edify minds and make the powerless powerful.

10.7 LET'S SUM UP

The unit extensively discusses about Bandhu Madhav's short story 'The Poisoned Bread'. Bandhu Madhav in his short story, 'The Poisoned Bread', through his protagonist YetalayaAja, has depicted psychological enslavement, servitude and slavery of Mahar community residing at out stretched or it can be said that at the suburb of Maharashtra. However, Mahadeva, a city-bread and bit learned grandson of Yetalaya is exhibited as aggressive and belligerent, with a flame of revolution in his eyes, and call for action against age old slavery, servitude, subjugation and exploitation in the hands of Caste-Hindus, who think themselves as a upper class, of a superior race, bestowed by 'their God', with certain ascribed specialities which their other fellow brothers do not have.

10.8 IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

- Write a detailed summary of 'The Poisoned Bread' by Bandhu Madhav.
- Why did Bapu Patil deny the grandson and grandfather's wage or share of corn at the end of the day? Explain in detail.
- What is the main theme of 'The Poisoned Bread' by Bandhu Madhav?
- Write a note on the impact of education in 'The Poisoned Bread'.
- What realization did the grandfather have on his death bed?

- What was grandfather's attitude when Bapu Patil humiliated him? Explain in detail.
- What was the wage that the grandfather and the grandson received at the end of the day?
- According to the grandfather what was the reason that prevented Mahar from being independent?

Keshav Meshram: The Barriers

10.9 ABOUT KESHAV MESHRAM

Keshav Tanaji Meshram was a Marathi poet, critic, novelist, and short-story writer from Maharashtra, India. He was born in a poor Dalit family in Akola on 24th November in the year 1937. Keshav Meshram has about 40 books in his credit. Being born in a poor family, Meshram spent his teens and early adulthood working as a railway wagon loader, a construction worker, and an oil mill worker. Even though struggling to make a living, he continued his education. After completing his graduation from college, he joined Western Railways as a clerk, but thereafter he secured the position of a Marathi lecturer at Maharshi Dayanand College in Parel, Mumbai.

Keshav Meshram's collection of poems 'Utkhanan' established him as a significant and notable poet. His most prominent novel 'Hakikat ani Jatayu' depicted and characterized the agony and suffering of a very intelligent Dalit youth named, Abhimaan, who was side lined because of his low social status. Meshram's autobiography Hakikat exhibits the development of a sensitive mind in a negative, inflicting and inimical world. His other literary works deal with the sorrow, sufferings and dilemma of the Dalits, however, he always exercised restraint in attacking the privileged, the upper classes for the plight and suffering.

Keshav Meshram in his presidential speech, criticized the contemporary literary folks for confining and restraining their world only to the high class and the elites without realization and awareness of the lives of millions of poor people in India. Simultaneously, he also criticized the extremist trend in contemporary Dalit literature, which strongly and powerfully attacked the privileged, the upper classes and then called itself "revolutionary". Keshav Meshram died of lung cancer on 3 December 2007.

10.10 ANALYSIS OF KESHAV MESHRAM'S THE BARRIER

Marathi poet, critic, novelist, and short-story writer Keshav Meshram's "The Barriers" (in Dangle's anthology) dramatizes the endgame of rigid social control and caste barriers, centering on a Mahar boy sent to school in another town who then becomes a pawn in the contest between an upper caste, a prejudiced master and a Dalit activist. The activist stirs the Dalit villagers with injustice, exploitation and abuse of things Brahminical, and the response embodies the quicksand of rightness and equity politics in the

villages. Seeing all this, [the Dalits] felt as if they were living in a new village. They had a chance to experience something new, this can be noticed from the above lines of the story;

"For a month the atmosphere of the village seemed fresh and new. Then habit, need and poverty brought them back to where they were before. Rituals began again. The Deshmukhs and the Kulkarnis breathed a sigh of relief. They were happy that the people remained the same in spite of changing their caste names. (52-3)

The names are changed, but not history, not ritual, not identity. What are we to make of this series of narratives exploring caste and equity? The lesson from this repeated and intermittent kind of scene is that equity politics are not enough and adequate to recode identity and the social institutions that are its embodiment. Postmodernity, on the other hand, that is seditious combination of media imaging and economic impetus and incentive, wreaks havoc. Identity politics, in other words, is to say that, are not a solution but a symptom of a more convoluted and intricate sedimentation of discontinuous and uneven formations that mix social, cultural, political, and most importantly economic modes. Th narrative of the Dalit case history is not invalid, but it provides an inadequate, incompetent, even simplistic model for "solving" the issues faced by the Dalits.

10.11 CONCLUSION

The unit extensively discusses about Keshav Meshram's short story 'The Barriers'. Even though the caste system bars equality to people, there still exists social injustice, discrimination and prejudice that have to do with the lower class and caste in India. In the year 1955, a constitution was made in India to legally abolish and eradicate "Untouchability". It was Dr. B.R. Ambedkar and Mahatma Gandhi who were the two most prominent and notable personalities who protested against the untouchability in India. Keshav Meshram's short story 'The Barriers' is a representative of Dalit literature. It basically deals with the lives of Dalits in Maharashtra. The story presents realistic accounts of the lives of the Dalits. It basically focuses on the plight, sorrow, suffering, poverty, exploitation, oppression, injustice, prejudice because of caste system, lack of education, and ignorance. The experiences expressed and conveyed through this short story by Keshav Meshram are the first-hand experiences. The life portrayed and delineated in this short story is predominantly rural where the chances of exploitations are more in comparison to urban life. Hence, the use of rural dialect gives appropriateness to the experiences.

10.12 IMPORTANT QUESTIONS

- Write a detailed analysis of Keshav Meshram's 'The Barrier'
- What was the main focus of Dalit Literature?
- What is the importance of a Dalit consciousness in Dalit writing. Explain.
- What are the aims of Dalit writing? Explain in detail.

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11

CRITICAL STUDY OF GITHA HARIHARAN'S 'THE ART OF DYING' AND 'GAJAR HALWA'

Unit Structure:

11.0 Objectives

11.1 Githa Hariharan — An Introduction

11.2 *The Art of Dying* — A Discussion

11.3 Characterization

11.4 Summarization

11.5 *Gajar Halwa* - A Discussion

11.6 Characterisation:

11.7 Narrative Techniques

11.8 Questions

11.9 Suggested Reading

11.0 Objectives

To introduce renowned short story writer Gita Hariharan to the readers

To study her 'The Art of Dying' and 'Gajar Halwa' and analyse important themes employed by her.

11.1 GITHA HARIHARAN - AN INTRODUCTION:

Githa Hariharan grew up in Bombay and in Manila. She was educated in these two cities and later in the United States, where she worked in public television. Since 1979, she has worked in Bombay, Madras and New Delhi, first as an editor in a publishing house, then as a freelancer. Githa has published several short stories in magazines and journals. The Art of Dying and Other Stories (1993) contains twenty of her short stories. Her two novels are: The Thousand Faces of Night (1992), and Where Dream Travel (1999) The Ghosts of Vasu Master (1994). The thousand Faces of Night her maiden novel, won her the prestigious Cornmenwealth Writers Award for 1993. She has also edited A Southern Wanlest a collection of short stories translated into English from four south Indian languages. She lives in New Delhi with her husband and two sons.

11.2 *THE ART OF DYING* - A DISCUSSION

In *A room of One's Own,* an early platform for women writers, Virginia Woolf says: "Women have served all these centuries as looking glasses, reflecting the figure of a man at twice its natural size.... A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction."

The Art of Dying, where the 20 stories seem autonomous splinters, sometimes jagged with thought but going nowhere specially interesting. Many of the stories are about people dying or inhabiting hopeless universes of boredom and social decay. All are written in paragraphs unnecessarily short, though perhaps with the good intention of showing the piecemeal ways in which many urban Indians live. Occasionally, the desuetude raises a small flicker: "The other day I had an especially gloomy feeling: that things go wrong in women's lives. You can plan sensibly, you can be wily or obedient at the right times, play the game by the rule, and even then, you lie in bed and worry: will the whole fragile mansion come crashing down?"

But such sparks are rarer in Hariharan's stories than in her novel. So, the blurb, which says "these stories never fail to surprise and delight", probably carries one word too many. Never.

In this collection, she talks about those aspects of Women which are erased, muted, ignored and mystified. The stories are a good source to know about the concepts of 'decency and 'honour and that too, with playful irony. One can easily find a connection between larger and smaller events and this is done in the form of so many voices In this collection ,with the help of twenty shot stories ,the writer has taken up so many different characters and twenty different topics .Death, Aging , Conflict ,Women and their condition, Loss and Change can be seen as important themes of this collection .She perfectly portrays death and its place in life .Krishna Daiya has mentioned the same thing in his book Post-independence Women Short Story Writers in Indian English: Death is the central preoccupation in this anthology .The title itself reflects the theme of the stories.

Death is not shown merely as an event but as a shadow looming large over life. Life is as if a journey and death, its only destination. The writer is unique in showing not only death but also its place in life. Death is portrayed as a phenomenon, sometimes dreaded and welcome, but inevitable.

11.3 CHARACTERISATION

Death in traditional Indian family is an adverse event which demands number of rituals to be performed after the funeral ceremony. Githa Hariharan reveals the changing attitude of the younger generation towards death at the backdrop traditional beliefs in her short story collection, The Art Of Dying. Death of a person, to some, gives the desired opportunity for self-discovery and, to others; it is a relief from tensions of life. Death also appears to be an act of despair, the inescapable destination of every living being on their journey. In her unique style of narration the writer portrays the characters and their reaction towards death. She has unquestionable skill in showing death as a phenomenon which is inevitable. Death is with a person from the very moment he is born whether he is conscious of it or not. But it doesn't mean that one should be fearful about it. Some deaths in still guilty conscious; while others a sense of relief based on the situation of people who live around the dead. The traditional reaction towards death is getting diluted.

Death, Disease, And Desire In "The Remains of the Feast" It is interesting to note that cancer is not subjected to medical gaze in this short story except for a few instances where the bodily suffering is detailed:

"My great-grandmother looked at her for a minute, her lips working furiously, noiselessly. For the first time in my life, I saw a fine veil of perspiration on her face. The muscles on her face twitched in mad, frenzied jerks. Then she pulled one arm free of the tubes, in a sudden, crazy spurt of strength, and the LV. pole crashed to the floor. 'Bring me a red sari,' she screamed. 'A red one with a big wide border of gold. And,' her voice cracked, 'bring me peanuts with chilli powder from the comer shop. Onion and green chilli bondas deep-fried in oil" (Hariharan 286).

Rukmini dies immediately after expressing her death wish. The urgency in her tone, punctured by her worsening condition, demands attention as it is an instance of rebelling against one's own body. This split between body and mind is not the conventional one, where the soul would transcend bodily limitations. Instead, this split indicates the ways in which women's bodies have been controlled, manipulated as docile bodies by the hegemonic discourse: firstly, as an (old) woman; secondly, as a Brahmin woman; thirdly, as a Brahmin widow. This is toppled by the fact that the burden of maintaining the tradition is thrust upon women.

Rukmini fights this cancerous oppression of patriarchy through her gluttonous acts. The body, thus, isn't in conflict with the mind; instead, it becomes a site where contesting values, ideologies, desires are inscribed; it, at once, is an agent of patriarchy and resistive to it; in other words, the body fights itself, blurring the line between the body as a diseased site and body as an ideological site. While Brahminical patriarchy restricts her to home-cooked food for all her life, she subverts these interdictions by ordering "lemon tarts, garlic, three types of aerated drinks, fruit cake laced with brandy, bhelpuri from the "fly-infested bazaar nearby" (Hariharan 285). In this light, it is noteworthy that she transgresses the codes laid for her caste, gender, her age and her medical condition. The cracking voice in the passage quoted above is an instance of a contestation where desire attempts to overpower disease.

Hariharan tactically foregrounds 'disease' as the site where the real and repressed, body and mind, desire and death, self and society are negotiated.

Marriage and the mother-in-law

A couple comes to see her; though married for four years, they can't have a baby. She sends them to a doctor, who pronounces her fine, but a virgin. It is only on their subsequent visit that

He says, the words tumbling out of his thick lips: She calls out to

my mother when I touch her.

And what does your mother do? I asked.

She has been sleeping between us every night for the last four years,

he replied, his hands still at last, clasped furtively on his lap.

These stories live in these nuances; the furtive hand, the gecko's eating the moth. In the title story, her mother's illness moves slowly, and there are flashbacks to the dead brother and his white girlfriend, Janet: "He was not sure, whether he wanted to marry her." Several times in the story, she talks of memory as a Time Machine that can only move back, to the days when one is younger:

11.4 SUMMARIZATION

Githa Hariharan is post-colonial woman grappling with the problem of individual identity and national identity at the same time. The detailed study of her work reveals the changing social, emotional and ideological set up in our country. Her Fiction acquaints with an understanding of women's issues and predicaments. Githa Hariharan with her intellectual standards, and sharp observation of life and has imparted a psychological depth to her female characters. She has projected a deep view of female psyche, inner aspiration and their peculiar responses to patriarchal society. Githa Hariharan makes us realize subordinate and inferior position of women in family and society. The need of the hour is to confer on woman the rightful, equal, independent status that would act as an impetus to her development as an individual and a social being. At last, the women characters of Hariharan are conscious of individuality and struggle for liberated feminist identity, along patterns of resistance, survival, imaginative choices and solidarity, leading to unexpected life stories.

11.5 *GAJAR HALWA* - A DISCUSSION

This story is a moving account of young Perurnayree's life in Salem and out of it. Life for her was extremely hard in Salem, The parents didn't get along. Mother was always screaming. So, the father left, it didn't seem to bother his wife one bit. 'We're well rid of him, he's a lazy drunken bastard, she sad. She went to work every day, even on days when she was sick or when her stomach was empty, to the highway they were building near their village. She would leave at six in the morning after drinking the strong, sweet tea Perumayee made for her. She coiled a rag on her head, ready for the baskets of gravel she would carry all day. On her hip she held the youngest child who was still breast-feeding. We don't need much imagination to know the extent of her drudgery to fend for her four children.

And Penunayee! Young Perumayee would get her brother Selvan ready for school, feed him his gruel, oil and comb his hair, and wave at him from the door of their hut. Then, along with Thayee, her baby sister, she would begin her chores for the day. Chores which included collecting the firewood, the water queue that got longer and longer (that's where she learnt to fight and push and shove), scrubbing the clothes hitting them again and again on the, rocks near the river. Her reward! 'That Perumayee is like a little mother, everyone said, the irony is too obvious. At an age when she should have

gone to school, she was taking care of her siblings. And we cannot blame her mother either. She is doing whatever she possibly can, whatever the circumstances allow her to do, to keep herself and her children alive - so that they can have some rice or gruel or once in a while a handful of dal in lots of tarnarind water.

No one could think things would get worse. They did. The highway was built after eighteen months of backbreaking work. NO more work thereafter. The rains failed for the second year, making life still harder, provisions costlier. Around that time their neighbour's cousin Chellamma was talking five of the village girls to Delhi with her. It was decided that Perumayee should go too so that she could earn something and send it home. That perhaps was the only way out. Perumayee stuck to Chellamma like a leech on the train and didn't look at anyone's face, then they reached her home, a small room in Munirka (a locality in Delhi) that smelt of urine. The room was actually a scooter garage but even this small, dark hole with no tap for water and no toilet, Chellamma has got after years of working for the same memsahib in the colony. Chellamma has no difficulty finding a job for Perumayee for two hundred rupees a month. Cooking, cleaning, washing, looking after the baba. Perumayee has to give Chellamma, her mother now, fifty rupees from her salary every Month. The rest she can send home. At the milk booth, which reminds her of the fights at the water-tap in the village, Perumayee makes friends with girls who work in the flats in the same colony. Their memsahibs are a lot like hers. They themselves are not very different from her. One can imagine the kind of childhood they have had and the family circumstances that have compelled them to take to this drudgery.

Githa Hariharan has very effectively portrayed the plight of the poor in rural India forcing them to reach Delhi in search of a better life, in quest of a dream. The hard realities of life take away their childhood, their innocence. Necessity is the mother of invention, they say. Necessity makes us invent lies, falsehoods. It makes us conceal the truth. Necessity to find a job for Perumayee makes Chellarnma tell the memsahib that the girl can cook, sweep and swab and look after children even though she knows full well that Perumayee has never cooked anything more than rice or gruel or perhaps a handfu! of dal once in a while. Telling the truth would mean getting fifty rupees less. It might also mean not getting a job and consequently taking the first train back to Salem. Necessity not only forces Perumayee to learn enough Hindi in a few weeks but also forces her to learn how to shirk work, how to swab quickly, skipping corners and under the beds when the mistress is not around or to just squeeze out the baby's stinking clothes with the yellow stains drying in crust on the diapers whereas back at home in Salem she used to scrub and scrub the clothes, hitting them again and again on the rocks near the river. Or she would steal a quick look behind her and pop bits of something or the other into her mouth. The chores she be situated supposed to do included peeling and grating mounds of carrots, or so it seems like to this young girl, for halwa. Scraping so many carrots leaves her arms stiff. Her fingers feel as if they will never straighten out again. And then stirring the pan of milk (with all these grated carrots) on the fire, round and round, scraping the sides of the

pan again and again her arm becomes numb with pain. This is an indication of the life ahead of her. Githa Hariharan has also managed to bring out the north-south contrast. The language problem, to begin with. It suits Perumayee in the beginning because she does not have to reply to memsahib's questions. She can pretend not to understand he: instructions or queries and just say yes or no, hoping it is the right answer. Even though she quickly picks up enough pf Hindi, she cannot pronounce gajar correctly. She must call it kaachar. And she is justifiably hurt when the mistress laughs at it. Her memsahib calls her Prema. Despite her education and ability to drive the car, she can't say Perumayee, the girl argues. Perhaps Perumayee doesn't realize that it is not her memsahib's inability to correctly pronounce her name, it is some kind of a social convention, social custom to shorten the name of your retainer. The change in weather. has also been indicated. The sun doesn't shine properly for days in Delhi. The water freezes Perumayee's fingers. In Salem, they obviously didn't have this problem with lots and lot of sun for most part of the year. The situation demands adjustment on various levels - physical, economic, emotional.

11.6 CHARACTERISATION:

The story is mainly about Perumayee - the young girl from Salem - and what all she goes through, in Salem and then in Delhi. It's also about her evolution and initiation into the city life and its ways. When Perumayee comes to Delhi, she feels she should speak the truth, tell her prospective mistress that she cannot cook anything more than rice or gruel and maybe dal. Quickly she learns the Delhi ways, learns to swab quickly, skipping comers and under the beds when the mistress is not looking, leams to just squeeze out the baby's stinky clothes without properly washing them. She learns not to slave for her memsahib, leams to shut the kitchen door, turn the gas knob to high and hold her hands over the onions sizzling in oil to feel warm and safe. Learns also that in six months, once she has picked up the basics of city housekeeping, she can get a job for double the money in a richer colony. In a few years' time she may be no different from our wise, fawning Chellamma, bringing young girls from the village and supplying maids to the city folks making, in the process, a quick buck or two herself. Chellamma, we are told, had brought five village girls with her to Delhi. We can safely surmise that the other four girls would be as quick at adapting themselves to the Delhi ways as our protagonist. We can also safely guess what Chellamma would have been like the first time she herself came to Delhi. The process goes on - as long as the circumstances don't change, Delhi will continue to entice the poor villagers. And the young village girls will continue to become part of the metropolitan system sacrificing their simplicity and innocence.

Chellamma knows how to bargain what, to say and when, how not to give in. She knows the exact words that would please or soften the memsahib. She knows the mistress is needy but she also knows that she should not stretch things too far. She is no good Samaritan - Perumayee has to pay her fifty rupees a month for her services and liaison work.

Then we have the mistress. We are not told her name. That's not important. What's important is that she badly needs a domestic help to do the chores and look after her baby. Perumayee is just a servant girl, No more or no less. The relationship between the two is very formal, matter-of-fact. She asks Chellamma her age - perhaps to gauge how much she knows, what all she can manage. She does not ask her name, does not ask her anything personal, Docs not want to know why she has come all the way to Delhi at such a young age. Does not want to know if she misses her mother. Being a mother herself, she could have shown some emotion, some concern for the girl. But she does not do so. Perumayee is coming to her as a maid -she should prove herself to be a good maid, and that's that. She is a typical mistress and the mistresses in other flats in the colony are a lot like her, Other maids are not very different from Perumayee either. So we can conclude that they too would be having more or less similar relationship with their employers. Education and affluence do not necessarily bring in understanding and compassion. Perumayee's mother has been portrayed in detail. An unhappy woman. A hardworking woman. She went to work every day, even on days when she was sick or when her stomach was hungry, to the highway being built near the village.

She would leave at six in the morning after taking just a cup of strong tea. On her hip she held the youngest child she was still breast-feeding. And she would carry on her head baskets gravel all day long. Her husband of gravel all day long. Her husband was lazy and drunkard. Obviously not bothered about his responsibility as the head of the family. Not bothered about his wife and four children. No wonder Perumayee's mother was lays screaming. She couldn't possibly see the children starve to death. She couldn't possibly watch the husband squander money on drinks - whatever little money there was. And so, he left. A very familiar scenario! And she is left to fend for her four children. Again, these characters are not given any names. This could be any couple in rural India. What is important is the situation, the compulsion of the situations. She is a brave woman who faces the situation with courage - accepts this backbreaking work when even this tunnel is blocked, takes the bold decision to send Perumayee with Chellamma in search of a job.

In a way all these are stereotypical characters but together they create a very vivid, moving picture of our society, of our times.

11.7 NARRATIVE TECHNIQUES

Gajar Halwa - a common homemade sweet-dish in winter in almost the whole of north India. A favourite dish. Githa Hariharan uses it as a very effective imagery. Making it requires a lot of hard work. Hours of peeling and grating and stirring. The young maid does it all - it gives her stiff fingers and arm numb with pain. Ofcourse, the great red gold warmth of the grainy, syrupy thickness, once it's ready, spreads all over her and she becomes part

of it, It symbolises the city life, the new life for Perumayee. Hard yet tempting. Like the carrots absorbing, sucking in and swallowing the sugar, the ghee and the milk, the city sucks in and absorbs numerous Chellarnmas and Perumayees who become part of its thickening red sweetness.

The device of contrast is also used to highlight the rural migration to the city. Back at home all that Perumayee has seen is rice or gruel or maybe a handful of dal and tamarind in the good days. She has never seen such a pile of carrots before. Nor so much of milk and sugar rind ghee. There is a gas stove and fridge, and they have meat thrice a week. Almost a dreamland. And then the water queues getting longer and longer in the village contrasted with the cold, fresh water gushing out of the city kitchen pipe, never ending, as if the entire river lies inside it. Scarcity and abundance! Her mother carrying the baskets of gravel on her head all day long and the memsahib driving a car and ordering her around. The backbreaking work her mother did to provide two (?) square meals for her children and the smooth, pink skin of her memsahib who has been to school just like her brother Selvan. To a much better school. Who wouldn't want to come over?

The city has other attractions too! Before sending any money home, Perumayee would like to buy a sweater, a blue one with shiny, beaded flowers, the kind she saw a girl wearing at the milk - booth queue, for herself. Then she wouldn't have to sleep with the thin, lumpy mattress on top of her, pretending it is a blanket. Quite fair and natural, one would say. Except that her mother and siblings back in the village might not even have a morsel to eat, given the miserable conditions there. But Perumayee forgets that. This is what the city does. Saps human emotions, human ties, and human bonds. Perumayee forgets, if only temporarily, the pressing needs of her family. Her memsahib forgets that she is a frail, young girl -- too frail and too young to do this kind of work.

Language has been used to denote moods and stress points. Peel, peel, grate, and grate. The repetition conveys the size of the pile of carrots and the hard work involved. Stir, stir, the memsahib says. And then - stir, stir, she barks. This one word conveys her anger and authority.

Colours have been used to heighten the over - all affect. The peeled carrots, freshly washed, dazzle Perumayee's eyes. Later, great red-gold warmth spreads all over her bones. The gajar halwa sucks in everything, likewise the city sucks in everyone. And the earlier spluttering becomes a faint but steady heave of red, like a heartbeat, then gentle sighs. And you eventually get used to it, accept it, and become part of it. In a way both these stories are concerned about how women deal with the sanction of space in the Indian society and the possibility or absence of choice in the broad context of our ethos and social mores.

11.8 QUESTIONS

1. The Miracle highlights man's cruelty to animals. Have you heard of the SPCA? Do you love animals? Which character impresses you the most in this story?
2. What is the essential message of this story?
3. Why does the doctor marry the typist at the end of the story?
4. Are education and faith mutually exclusive?
5. Perumayee feels that her father left them because her mother was always screaming. Do you agree with her analysis?

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